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Observations on the Sermons of Elias
Hicks. 1826

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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
SERMONS OF ELIAS HICKS,
IN
SEVERAL LETTERS TO HIM;
WITH
SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS,
ADDRESSED TO THE
JUNIOR MEMBERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

BY A DEMI-QUAKER.

Robert Wake

"To expect that we should be informed of the divine economy with the same distinctness as of our own duty, would be a piece of arrogance above ordinary."—*Burgh.*

"Dim, as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
Is reason to the soul: and as on high,
Those rolling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here: so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day."—*Dryden.*

PHILADELPHIA:

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1826.

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June 11, 1939

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TO
THE JUNIOR MEMBERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

THE situation in which the Society of Friends has of late been placed, has, I have no doubt, attracted the attention of all its members; and that even those among you who have not been in the habit of attending its meetings for discipline, are no strangers to their proceedings, although you have not yet felt it your duty to take any part in them: And to you more especially I submit the observations contained in the following letters.

When in my early days I sometimes attended these meetings, my mind was filled with admiration at the harmony and prudence with which their affairs were conducted, and that genuine christian forbearance, one with another, which enabled them to triumph over all the difficulties which are imposed by conflicting opinions, and generally to unite in the adoption of such measures as true wisdom dictated; and it was gratifying to me to observe that it was, to other sects, a subject of wonder, how any numerous association could conduct their business without the intervention of votes or other substitutes, to ascertain the opinions of the majority of the assembly.

The form is, I have no doubt, yet preserved, and the language of forbearance and humility retained by many who in their hearts entertain far different feelings; and the proceedings have in several instances proved, that the spirit which formerly pervaded these assemblies, no longer prevails in some of them.

Why this great change has taken place, will no doubt be ascribed to different causes by the parties more immediately interested: an impartial spectator may form conclusions different from many of them, and may be permitted to ask, whether the leading causes may not have been produced by some of that class, to

whom the great majority of the members of the society look for instruction.

The situation of a christian teacher is of awful responsibility, and in the Society of Friends peculiarly beset with dangers, not only because of the high claim on which their ministry is founded, and which seems to require a degree of unremitting watchfulness with which it is difficult for man to comply; but also, because it requires a constant attention to keeping the mind in that state of lowliness and humility, which can alone preserve them from mistaking the wanderings of the imagination for a call of duty; and from those feelings which lead them to seek after the applause of men. Hence it must necessarily follow, that but few among them are always preserved in such a state of mind, as not to require the caution and advice of their friends: and consequently, that some portion of the society must be selected to watch over their conduct; and as this is an office of the greatest importance to their well being, the greatest care ought to be observed in the appointment. The elders are the depositaries of this power, so essential to the very existence of the society; and as the most prudent and cautious use of it cannot always prevent the objects of their attention from feelings of resentment, so it will naturally follow, that those to whom the exercise of it is most necessary, will always be the most zealous in abridging it.

This impatience of control is increased by a ranting spirit which seems of late to have infected a portion of the society, and which, in its consequences, is always more injurious than infidelity itself; and generally arises from a restlessness of disposition, which not content with the measure of light which may have been imparted, is always aspiring after greater things. It arises from a desire after distinction; and as this disposition must prevent a growth in genuine religion, the delusions of self-love easily enable a man to substitute his own imaginations for revelations; and as every passion is strengthened by indulgence, he proceeds from one step to another, until he fancies himself under the constant and peculiar guidance of the spirit, not only in his religious duties, but in all the temporal concerns of life. It naturally follows, that when he has persuaded himself that he is thus gifted and endowed, he will feel himself above the advice of men, and regard all regulations which may have a tendency

to restrain his wanderings, as obstructing him in his duties, and it will be one of his favourite objects to relieve himself from all control. How individuals actuated by such passions can subject the minds of others to their illusions, would indeed be wonderful, did not history furnish sufficient proof that it is difficult to calculate too largely on the credulity of a portion of mankind.

Whenever this disposition of mind is discovered, especially in any part of the ministry, every reflecting member of society must perceive the necessity of adopting means to prevent the injurious consequences of it; and as that duty more especially devolves on the elders, (who are, and always have been, the true and efficient support of the society,) they soon become objects of dislike to the sublimated spirits opposed to them, and the diminution of their power and authority, the first and favourite scheme.

That they will not succeed, I am fully persuaded; because I think it must be evident to every unclouded mind, that without such salutary interference as they often find it necessary to exercise, all order and propriety would be banished from the society.

Cunning is not more inconsistent with fanaticism, than it is with lunacy; for however perverted the mind may be in relation to particular subjects, we often see individuals in both situations, adopting the most plausible means for the accomplishment of the most irrational objects. It is not therefore to be expected that any attempts will be made totally to abolish the eldership: such a proposal would hardly be successful; but if means are found to render that body less independent, and to diminish the weight and authority which they have long and deservedly possessed, it may subserve the cause, and lead to ultimate success in their projects: and here, if any where, the danger seems to be.*

* Since writing the above, I have been informed that this attempt has actually been made in the yearly meetings in Philadelphia and New York, under the pretext of a necessity of subjecting all important appointments to change at stated periods. No measure could be devised more injurious to the society, and every friend to its welfare must rejoice that it was rejected. I know there are many very pious labourers in the ministry of this people, yet I think it must be evident to every observing mind, that there never was a period since the existence of the society, in which there was greater necessity of unremitting watchfulness on the part of the elders; and that so far from its being expedient to diminish their control, it ought, if possible, to be rendered more efficient. There is a spirit now abroad, which if not checked,

It is with this disposition that such extraordinary solicitude has been manifested, to induce the youth of the society and others of its members, who had before silently attended to its proceedings, to take part in its deliberations, and to flatter them into a belief that they are qualified to administer to its affairs and direct its proceedings; instead of recommending an endeavour to discipline the mind to the weighty business of the society, and cautioning them against indulging a spirit of judging without a serious and solemn consideration of the subject; and against interrupting the business by their councils, unless it is under a solemn impression of duty.

The effect has been such as might be expected, and was probably intended. Individuals who had before taken no part in the deliberations of the society, and who, (however respectable in life,) had never evinced that disposition of mind which had before been thought a necessary qualification of an active member, are now among the most busy; and some of the younger portion of the society forgetting that modesty is the most becoming ornament of youth, are found opposing their unripe notions with unhesitating pertinacity, to the wisdom and experience of age.

Under these circumstances is it not proper for you to consider whether you have not a part to act? When you look back to the history of your society and consider its admirable organization; and when you reflect on the respectable standing, to which the unostentatious propriety by which all its transactions have been governed, has raised it; you must be impressed with an honest zeal for its welfare; and that reverence which every ingenuous mind feels for the institutions and practices of their ancestors, strengthened as it is in this case by the best of all tests, a long experience, must induce you to oppose the innovations of the restless agitators of the present day: and your good sense will, I trust, enable you to distinguish between true religion and fa-

will devastate this society. Who would be the principal agents is not for me to say; but one thing is certain, that if there is any disposition on the part of its ministers to relieve themselves from this control, it is sufficient evidence of the necessity of it. Such a disposition must proceed from a mind not imbued with true christian humility, but presumptuously confident in itself. It is spiritual pride, than which nothing is more injurious and odious in a christian professor.

naticism, and not permit you to lose your reverence for the one, in contemplating the wild deformity of the other.

And perhaps you may be induced to believe that your attendance at the meetings for discipline, may not be without its use; that your presence may give additional strength and encouragement to the long tried standard bearers, and though you may not feel yourselves called upon to take a very active part in their deliberations, your example may be of use to some of those forward spirits, who, whatever may be their exterior appearance, are less qualified for the important business than many of yourselves.

I know there are individuals in every stage of life, who judge of preaching as others do of music, by the concord of sweet sounds; and who are convinced more by the harmony of a well turned sentence, than by the sentiment it is intended to convey; whose religion is founded on sensation rather than reflection, and is an affair of feeling instead of a deliberate sense of duty. To these I have nothing to say. My endeavour has been to show the inconsistencies into which men are led, by unfounded pretensions to a state of perfectability,* and an acquaintance with the inscrutable workings of Providence, (which all experience proves to be unattainable by man;) to show that such lofty aspirations are not in accordance with the genuine principles of the religion of Jesus Christ; and that it is by a submissive acquiescence in the measure of knowledge communicated, and an anxious endeavour to fulfil the obligations it imposes, rather than by curious researches into hidden things, that we best perform our duties here; and as no intelligent mind among you can believe that the suggestions of infinite wisdom are ever contradictory, it was part of my plan to show the inconsistencies in the doctrines of the great leader of the illuminati of your society.

* Perfection, in the sense in which it is understood by some people, frequently leads to great extravagance on religious subjects, by inducing men to believe that they have eradicated from their hearts every propensity to evil, and have arrived at a state of stainless purity. There is a great difference between the perfection of the Creator and man. The perfection of man consists in his possessing all that is requisite to attain the end of his creation; and the proper question for him to consider, is not whether he has arrived at that perfection which is the promised reward in another state of being, but whether he has by careful diligence and attention secured for himself that reward.

If I have succeeded in this, and to your deliberate examination I submit it, my task is accomplished; for if we are permitted to judge of the sermons as the arguments of a simple individual, sure I am, there are none among you habituated to reflection, who will not discover that they abound with inconsistencies, and are totally irreconcilable with reason, and the authority of the Scriptures. And you must unite with me in lamenting the strange illusion which induced the author of such discourses to declare that "he dare not speak at random, otherwise he should show that he departed from God's illuminating spirit."

LETTER I.

When I some time since addressed you, I expressed an anxious wish that you would submit to the consideration of your friends, your scheme of religion, in such a form as would enable them to examine it with deliberation; because I did believe that on this momentous subject, too much care could not be exercised. My wish has been gratified, not by your immediate agency, but by the zeal of your followers, who have caused a number of your discourses to be printed and published to the world.

When I sat down to read them, I did not expect to find a regularly concocted system, because I did not believe you had a mind capable of very extensive combination; but I did imagine you had given to your plan some semblance of consistency, and that if there was no adhesion, there would be no striking incongruity in its parts. In this I have been disappointed; for in it, nothing can be discovered but disjointed effusions, and attempts to give to different passages of Scripture novel constructions; to amuse the fancy, and engage the mind in useless enquiries after hidden things; to withdraw it from its proper business; to entangle it in the web which the vanity and restlessness of man has woven; and to substitute for that pure and simple worship which consists in prostration of spirit before the throne of grace, a grateful acknowledgment of his goodness, and humble thankfulness for the measure of light received; lofty speculations on subjects more

curious than beneficial; which can have no tendency to mend the heart, and which often lead into unprofitable controversies and perplexity of mind; for it will ever remain a truth that "the judgments of the Lord are unsearchable and his ways past finding out."

The christian religion is of so much importance, and has so long engaged the attention of men; it has occasioned so much research and so many controversies; so many sermons have been preached, and so many books written, upon every part of it, that nothing new can be said upon the subject; yet such is the nature of man, that he is always requiring some novelty to rouse his attention and amuse his mind. This may perhaps furnish some apology for the preacher of a sect whose form of worship requires sermons at stated times, if he sometimes indulges in metaphorical allusion, or contrives to expand his discourse by ingenious digression. With the genuine quaker this plea must be unavailing: impressed with the sublime idea that it is by silence and abstraction from all outward things, that the mind is best fitted for true and acceptable worship, it must follow, that when a minister imbued with this spirit feels himself called upon to offer advice or instruction, he will be careful "not to multiply words without knowledge, by which counsel is darkened." But prolixity is the vice of oratory; it infects the pulpit, the senate, and the bar. There is something so gratifying to the pride and vanity of man in the display of this talent, or so fascinating is the music of his own voice, that it is almost always carried to excess; and we often see the orator pursuing his course with undiminished vigour, long after his exhausted auditors have withdrawn their attention from him.

You possess some of the qualities essential to the orator; you are voluble of speech and impressive in your delivery, and you have that confidence in the powers of your own mind, which secures you from hesitation and embarrassment: but you are deficient in others, without which all is unavailing; your perception is obscure, and your ratiocination singularly defective; and you are peculiarly unfortunate in the belief that you excel in that faculty in which you are most deficient. Hence we find you plunging into the fathomless depths of metaphysics with fearless confidence; stating propositions and assuming inferences in

direct opposition to them, and such is your fondness for amplification, that even when the truth of your proposition is self-evident, you contrive to involve it in obscurity by the redundancy of your expletives, and the profusion of your attempts at illustration. You condemn all human science, for you are ignorant; yet from the whole body of ministers of that society of which you are still a member, you cannot select an individual who makes such a lofty display of technical terms, or more frequently endeavours to elucidate his observations by reference to it. You believe in the doctrine of inspiration, and you seem to claim the possession of it to a degree with which few are favoured: you say it is an unerring director, and plainly to be understood, and yet declare that all its dictates must be governed by the fallible reason of man.

Having given to reason this unlimited dictatorship, it was natural to expect that you would recommend the most assiduous cultivation of it; but you have interdicted the only means by which it is improved, and denounced by a curse those who are engaged in extending it.*

All this confusion arises from your not having formed any precise idea of the terms you apply. With the words *reason* and *rational* continually in your mouth, you have never enquired into the nature and operation of that distinguishing faculty of man, nor of the manner in which alone it can be properly applied to the truths of our religion. You appear to consider it as of physical organization; an instinct of our nature which is perfected without care or cultivation, and that like one of our natural senses, it may be summoned to our aid without fear of error in its perceptions. You cannot be ignorant of the great inferiority of the reasoning powers of man in his savage state, and a little enquiry

* See discourses delivered in Philadelphia, page 53. "Oh that men of science might be aware what a curse they are to the inhabitants of the earth; what a great curse." There is no novelty in this opinion, for we find a poet more than two hundred years ago making Jack Cade exclaim, "thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm, in erecting a grammar school: and whereas before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and tally, thou hast caused printing to be used; and contrary to the king, his crown and dignity, thou hast built a paper mill. It will be proved to thy face, that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a *noun* and a *verb*, and such abominable words as no christian can endure to hear."

would have taught you, that observation and experience are the foundation of all knowledge, and that as we can only reason from the ideas existing in our own minds, it is by their increase alone that our reasoning faculty is extended. Hence it must follow, that as it is the noblest gift of the Almighty to man; a germ which without cultivation can never flourish, it is our duty to promote its growth and expansion by every means in our power.

I am not insensible of the evils which have arisen from the presumption with which some learned men have endeavoured to destroy that religion which is the foundation of our hope; but we ought to recollect that such is the perversity of man, that if the abuse of the blessings of Providence can be adduced as an argument against their enjoyment, there are few indeed in which we can innocently indulge. Nor is ignorance any security against this presumption; on the contrary its decisions are always more bold and dogmatic; and if they are less injurious, it is only because they are more foolish.

That we could never have arrived at a knowledge of our spiritual duties, or of many gospel truths by the deductions of human reason, is evident; were it otherwise, the revelations under the christian dispensation would have been unnecessary; but we are not to infer from this, that our reason is to be silent on this all important object; for if it is the subject of our cogitations, it is of course under the examination of our reasoning powers, and hence arises the importance of endeavouring so to improve this talent, as to enable us to unravel the subtilty of the sophist, and separate the gold, from the dross of the enthusiast. Were we all well instructed in the right use of our reason, we should be able to distinguish between that which is above, and that which is contrary to it; and we should confine it to its proper place, which is, *not to judge of things revealed, but of the reality of revelation.* To attempt to test the truth of the things revealed, by our reason, is inconsistent with it: they are given to us in a supernatural way, which of itself, discovers the impossibility of examining them by deductions from our own ideas; but the reality of the revelations themselves, stands on very different ground. Admirable as is the instruction to be drawn from them, the Almighty in mercy to man, did not leave them on their intrinsic merits alone; they were accompanied by signs and wonders, the evidence of the

divine power by which they were sent. The life of our blessed Saviour, his doctrines, and the miracles which he wrought, have been recorded in the Scriptures, and handed down for our instruction and government; and as no man can be a christian who does not believe in them, I am fully persuaded that every candid and diligent enquirer, will find sufficient evidence of their authenticity to satisfy his mind; and that being satisfied, his faith in the things revealed will be established.

Now although I agree with you, that the inspirations of man in our day, are to be examined by the rule of right reason, I fear we shall not concur in our manner of conducting the enquiry. We have no extraordinary signs accompanying them, and we all know, how easy it is to mistake the suggestions of the imagination for the operations of the spirit of truth on the mind; and the strange visions which enthusiasm often produces, and as it is sometimes difficult to discover the source from which they spring, it is a satisfaction to know that we have a standard by which error itself may be rendered innoxious.

"I am far (says Locke,) from denying that God can, or doth sometimes, enlighten men's minds in the apprehending of certain truths, or excite them to good actions, by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary signs accompanying it. But in such cases we have reason and Scripture, unerring rules, to know whether it be from God or no. Where the truth embraced is consonant to the revelation in the written word of God, or the action conformable to the dictates of right reason, or Holy Writ, we may be assured that we run no risk in entertaining it as such; because, though it be not an immediate revelation from God, extraordinarily operating on our minds, yet we are sure it is warranted by that revelation which he has given us of truth. But it is not the strength of our private persuasion within ourselves, that can warrant it to be a light or motion from Heaven; nothing can do that but the written word of God without us, or that standard of reason which is common to us with all men. Where reason or Scripture is express for any opinion or action, we may receive it as of divine authority; but it is not the strength of our own persuasions which can by itself give it that stamp. The bent of our own minds may favour it as much as we please; that

"may show it a fondling of our own, but will by no means prove it to be an offspring of Heaven, and of divine original."

Here is a great coincidence between the opinions of the christian philosopher and the quaker apologist; and although they refer to right reason as well as the Scriptures, as our guide, they meant not to use them in contradistinction to each other. When we refer to either of two rules to solve a proposition, it is because both will produce the same result; and they introduced the word reason, as applicable only to those opinions and actions, respecting which, the Scriptures are silent.

If, says the philosopher, the doctrine is consonant to reason or Scripture, it may be received without risk, although it may not proceed from an immediate revelation of God. Divine revelation, says the apologist, can never contradict the outward testimony of the Scriptures or right reason; and whatever any do, pretending to the spirit, which is contrary to the Scriptures, must be accounted and reckoned a delusion of the devil.

By this test no genuine quaker can object to being tried,* "for he preaches no new gospel, but that which is confirmed by all the miracles of Christ and his apostles; and he offers nothing but that which he is able and ready to confirm by the authority of the Scriptures, which all protestants acknowledge to be true." It is indeed the only criterion by which we can judge of the faith of man, and by that criterion, how few of your sermons would escape condemnation.

LETTER II.

It may now be proper to state the motives which have again induced me publicly to address you, and to inform you what course it is my intention to pursue; and as I have no standing in the church, and am aloof from those scenes which must sometimes give rise to asperities, even in the bosom of meekness, have no personal acquaintance with you, and have been taught to re-

* Barclay.

spect your private character, I enter upon the subject, uninfluenced by many of the passions and prejudices which sway and control the opinions of man. But although not in membership, I feel a deep interest in the Society of Friends, and while I am without that sectarian spirit, which in the narrow breasts of some individuals, confines all true worship to a particular description of people, (and which I am happy in believing is no part of a quaker's faith;) long observation has convinced me, that there is no society whose principles and discipline are more eminently successful in inculcating the moral doctrines of christianity, and there is none whose religious tenets are more in conformity with my own ideas of true spiritual worship.

I have perused your religious discourses with some attention, and as they appear to me to be in a style, seldom, if ever before, heard in the meetings of the Society of Friends; are abounding in terms which if not rightly understood may lead into great error, and with propositions, which, in the conclusions that may be drawn from them, may be destructive to religion, I thought I should not be unprofitably employed in endeavouring to separate your principles from the mass of expletives and allusions, in which they are enveloped; to discover the true object which you have in view, and to show the inconsistencies in which you have involved yourself by your attempts to define inscrutable things: and if I should sometimes be thought to indulge in language unsuitable to the solemnity of the subject, my only excuse can be, that when you occasionally favour your auditors with a display of your reasoning powers, there is such a neglect of all order in your arrangement, and such metaphorical confusion in your ideas, that when you arrive at your usual conclusion, "now how plain this is," the effect is so comic that it would extort a smile from gravity itself.

In the examination of the doctrines of every christian teacher, the first and most essential point, is their conformity to the Scriptures; but as your many deviations from them have been shown with sufficient clearness in a pamphlet lately published, I shall not enter into the subject generally, although I may occasionally refer to them. Neither do I propose to enter upon an analysis of each particular discourse, for they are mixed up of so many heterogeneous materials, are so diversified in their objects, and so

devious in their courses, that the end I have in view will perhaps be best answered, by referring only to such topics, as in their consequences, are of most importance.

In the first discourse in the volume now before me, which was delivered at Friends' meeting house in Mulberry street, your principal objects appear to be, to depreciate the value of the Scriptures, and to disprove the account of the miraculous birth of our Saviour. On the first subject it may hereafter be proper to make some observations; to the latter I shall now give my attention.

After several allusions to the birth of our Saviour, you come forward and explicitly state your own belief; and unlike those who have preceded you in this path, and who have endeavoured to destroy our faith in the miracle, by arguments drawn from the Scriptures, you take a shorter road, and declare *it is impossible*.

You say * "By the analogy of reason, *spirit cannot beget a material body*, because the thing begotten, must be of the same nature with its father. *Spirit cannot beget any thing but spirit, it cannot beget flesh and blood*. No, my friends, it is *impossible*."

I have in a former letter referred to this assertion, and had you confirmed the opinion which I then intimated, that it was a hasty expression, and uttered without your perceiving its tendency, I should not again allude to the subject. But you found yourself seated between the horns of a dilemma. If you admitted it was an inconsiderate expression, you abandoned your high claim to inspiration; and if you re-assumed it, in its obvious meaning, it would be an adoption of principles which I sincerely hope you do not entertain; and you have endeavoured to escape by an explanation which, although it narrows the meaning, does not relieve it from the stain of impiety; and is a proof, (if any further proof is wanting,) that such a course cannot proceed from the inspirations of the spirit of truth.

You say, that in denying the power of the spirit to *beget*, you did not mean to question the power to *create*. To limit is to destroy the omnipotency of the Creator; and when we see such a creature as man, presuming to scan His power and determine what He can, or cannot do, the feelings which its profanity would

* See discourse delivered at Friends' meeting house, in Mulberry street, page 11.

otherwise occasion, are lost in our astonishment at its arrogance and presumption. But you have announced your opinion not only as sanctioned by divine inspiration, but as being according to "the true analogy of reason," and yet, taken with your subsequent explanation, it is enveloped in absurdity. In admitting the power to create, you have destroyed your own argument; for you cannot suppose that there was an individual present in the meeting, so grossly dull as to believe that when the prophecy was accomplished in the birth of our Saviour, it was by the means which your explanation points to; or that it was other than a miraculous intervention of that merciful Being, who in his unlimited power and inscrutable wisdom, has chosen his own way in directing us to a knowledge of those truths which the gospel unfolds. And if we assent to your doctrine in the restricted sense in which you say you intended the word *beget* to be understood; we must believe there are sexes in spirit, and that it can only be produced by a corporeal union of incorporeal beings.

Here is no proof of your ability to draw conclusions from the *analogy of reason*, but it is a striking illustration of the wisdom of the counsel, "not to multiply words without knowledge."

A very keen and accurate observer of the foibles and infirmities of man remarks, "it would be well, if people would not lay "so much weight on *their own reason* in matters of religion, as "to think every thing impossible and absurd, which they cannot "conceive: how often do we contradict the right rules of reason "in the whole course of our lives? *Reason* itself is true and "just, but the reason of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interests, his passions, and his vices."*

If, as I truly believe, the christian religion is intended to subdue the wanderings of the imagination, and bring the mind into a humble dependance on our Creator, it seems necessarily to follow, that we ought to be anxiously careful to prevent its being drawn into a too great fondness for enquiries into unsearchable things. In the course of my reading, I have lately perused the prayer of a very learned man,† which, for its rational and fervent piety, must be instructive to all, and in a particular manner to

* Swift.

† Dr. Johnson.

those who are *our teachers*. It is the prayer of one whose writings will be read with instruction and delight as long as our language endures; whose intellectual faculties were of the highest order, and who was sufficiently sensible of his superiority, when compared with most other men: yet, when in solitude and private worship, he looked beyond all sublunary things, and contemplated the immensurable distance between the wisdom of man and his Creator, with deep prostration of mind he prayed "Oh, Lord, my maker and protector, who hast graciously sent me into this world to work out my salvation, enable me to drive from me all such unquiet and perplexing thoughts as may mislead or hinder me in the practice of those duties which thou hast required. When I behold the works of thy hands, and consider the course of thy providence, give me grace always to remember that thy thoughts are not my thoughts, nor thy ways my ways: and while it shall please thee to continue me in this world, where much is to be done, and little to be known; teach me by thy holy spirit, to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous enquiries, from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impossible to be solved. Let me rejoice in the light which thou hast imparted, let me serve thee with active zeal and humble confidence, and wait with patient expectation for the time in which the soul which Thou receivest, shall be satisfied with knowledge. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake."

And that it is with minds thus disciplined, that all ought to be prepared for prayer, and that in this spirit alone, can the preacher awaken the mind to true worship, are truths which few professors of the christian name, and none who believe in the doctrines of Friends, can doubt.

LETTER III.

If, in my succeeding observations, I refer to the opinions held by any other sect than that in which I have been educated, I wish it to be understood, that it is neither to approve nor censure. Believing, (as I sincerely do,) that christianity consists not in

forms or observances; neither in subscriptions to curiously contrived creeds, nor in confessions of faith; but in that worship which purifies and cleanseth the heart; so I believe that he who ministers to a congregation in this spirit, (whatever may be his name among men,) ministers profitably; "and that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together."

In reading your sermons, it evidently appears that you have imbibed the notions of a sect, who attribute much more to reason, than any other christian society, and you have asserted that you are unable to believe any thing which you cannot bring down to the level of your own understanding;* yet you believe in direct revelation, and with singular inconsistency assert that all your discourses are from its immediate dictates, and without the intervention of any other cause; thus calling upon your auditors to assent to that which you assert to be impossible; for by no process of human reason can the reality of your revelations be tested, and if they are assented to, it must be by faith alone.

I know that you have been hailed as an *efficient fellow labourer* in destroying our belief in some doctrines which are considered as fundamental by almost every christian sect, and I am apprehensive that this applause has stimulated you to greater daring: but you ought to recollect how much easier it is to destroy than to build up, and you may be assured that when the work of destruction is accomplished, your services will be at an end: your coadjutors have too much understanding not to perceive, that you have not sufficient knowledge to aid in erecting the building which is to be raised on the ruins, and that you are without the skill necessary to give uniformity to its appearance, or embellishment to its parts. When the temple of reason is finished and

* See Letter to Dr. Atlee. "I admit that I did assert and have long done it, that we cannot believe what we do not understand." This assertion is in curious contrast to some others which he has made. In a discourse before alluded to, he has declared the miraculous birth of our Saviour to be impossible; and in his letter to Thomas Willis, he says, that after believing in the miracle for many years, he has read the ancient History of the Church and the Evangelists with a view to this subject, and that according to his best judgment, Jesus Christ is the son of Joseph; yet he declares in the same letter, that he still retains his original belief: thus proving that he has a mind capable of believing not only what he does not understand, but also against the convictions of his understanding.

dedicated, you may be permitted to worship in its vestibule, but will never be called upon to administer the rites at its altar.

It seems, however, that you are not quite ignorant of the apparent inconsistency of these contradictory assertions, and it is proper that your explanations should be fairly examined, that we should endeavour to ascertain what you really mean by the word *reason*, and how it is to be applied to your own inspirations: in order to do this, it will be necessary to quote your own words.

In a discourse delivered in New York, you say, "Now we learn as rational creatures, that God spoke to the Israelites not only as such, but that he always addresses us as rational creatures. Were we not rational creatures we could not understand; for nothing is a recipient for the spirit of God but the rational soul, and therefore we are always to understand him rationally; for this is *according to the nature of things*."

In this remark, the only novelty is, the confusion in which your ideas are involved; for I cannot believe there were any of your audience so ignorant as not to know that it is *according to the nature of things*, that as we were created rational creatures, we should be addressed as such; and that if we were without understanding, we could not understand.

Again you say, "as reason is a dormant principle without revelation, so when God is pleased to reveal things unto the immortal souls of the children of men, they are then seen rationally: and then reason has an opportunity to exercise its *balancing and comparing principle* in man, and therefore there is a two-fold revelation to man."

You surely cannot intend to persuade us, that reason has always been dormant without revelation, or you must yourself be ignorant, or believe that we are ignorant, of the writings handed down to us, and which sufficiently attest the powers of the human mind, even when unilluminated by the revelations of the Gospel, and in the darkest ages of Paganism. And if, as I suppose, you meant to limit this dormant principle, (as you call it,) to the revelations of the spirit, you involve it in absurdity. We will now examine your propositions, and endeavour to discover the deductions to be drawn from them. You say that reason is a dormant principle without revelation;—when any thing is revealed by

God, it is seen rationally;—that then reason is to exercise its balancing and comparing principle, and the result is, that there is a two-fold revelation in man.

We have heretofore been taught to believe, that the only way in which we can arrive at a knowledge of the truth of any thing by our reason, is by the deductions drawn from the ideas which have been impressed on our minds by the use of our natural faculties; and that revelation is a special communication, in a manner independent of these faculties. But admitting that all the theologians and metaphysicians who have preceded you, have been in error, and that you alone are acquainted with the nature and operation of the faculty of reason, in what does it result? Why, when the Almighty reveals any thing to our souls, He, by another revelation, enables us to examine and discover whether the first revelation is right; but you have not told us, by which we are to be governed, if they differ. If you say they always accord, then a two-fold revelation is superfluous, and you admit that “our Creator never deals superfluously with us;”^{*} and if they should disagree, how are we to decide? Your great and leading maxim, “that for which a thing is such, the thing itself “is more such,” will not apply, for both revelations are immediate and from the same source; and it will be necessary for the *numerous*[†] converts which your maxim has made, again to apply to you to solve the difficulty. Can folly itself believe that the truth of any thing revealed to our immortal souls by infinite wisdom, requires confirmation; or that if it does, that confirmation can be found in the authority from which it was first derived? And is it not extraordinary, that any individual can go on day after day, and year after year, professing to explain to us the nature and object of revelation, and the use of our reason when applied to it; and yet not know, that divine revelation must be immutably true, and that as it is communicated in a way wholly unconnected with our reason, all reasoning upon it is vain. Whether the revelation is from a divine source is another question, and one which our reason may sometimes enable us to solve.

In the discourse you delivered at Newtown in Bucks County,

^{*} See sermon preached in Philadelphia, page 8. [†] See letter to Dr. Atlee

you enter more largely on this subject; and as it seems to comprise all your notions in relation to reason, as connected with our religion, it is proper to examine it with particular attention.

You say, **“Right reason is as much a gift of God, as any gift that we can receive: therefore, nothing but the rational soul is a recipient for divine revelation; and when the light shines upon it and shows any object, reason brings it to the test. If it is kept in right order, and under the regulating influence of the divine law, it brings things to balance, and it is brought to know every thing which may rise up, although at first sight. If it will not accord with right reason, we must cast it off as the work of Antichrist. All that the Almighty requires of us, will always result in reality; and we are not to believe any thing which does not so result. Here now we see how easy it is to go along, if we pursue the right course; but as free agents, we can reason ourselves into the belief that wrong is right.”*

I have perused this passage with great attention, and so far from discovering any thing to enable me to get easily along, it appears to be wholly inexplicable. I have examined it as a whole, and in its different divisions, without being able to arrive at any result. In this perplexity I recollected that I was, in my youth, in company with several ancient friends, when some discussion occurred respecting the true interpretation of a passage in a book which was the subject of conversation. An individual present, with some flippancy observed, that he had read it with great attention both backwards and forwards several times, and thought he was able to explain it; when he was interrupted by a venerable old man, who with admirable gravity of countenance and simplicity of manner, said *“He wished the friend to inform the company, in which way of reading, he understood it best.”* But here even this novel experiment must fail, and had the ingenious expounder tried it on the passage I have quoted, I fear he must have confessed it was equally unintelligible in either way; and that, being contrary to all reason, it must, if examined by the severity of your own rule, be deemed the work of Antichrist.

If you had said that no revelation can be the suggestion of infinite wisdom, if contrary to right reason, it would have been in-

* See sermons, page 207.

telligible and true; but if the divine light really discovers any thing to us, we want no test to confirm it. Again you say, that reason, if kept under the regulating influence of the divine law, will know every thing that rises up, at first sight; but that as free agents, we can reason ourselves into a belief that wrong is right. Now what kind of reason can this be? It does seem that reason is given to us because we are free agents, and that it would be a very useless gift were it otherwise: and we do know that this faculty is improved by observation and experience, and that so far from its enabling us to know every thing at first sight, it is by study and meditation that our knowledge is extended, and that at last, we know but little. But the reason of which you speak, is a reason that arrives at all knowledge without deduction, and can act and determine with unerring certainty, although contrary to that reason which is given to us as free agents. It must follow, that the faculty which you call reason, is an instinct never before known to exist; or that all this circumlocution ends in the production of one of those phantasms which are sometimes engendered by the imagination, and which has persuaded you that two inspirations are necessary to confirm our belief, that they are distinct in their nature, and that one of them is right reason.

When the sensations occasioned by the sonorous voice in which the pompous terms *analogy of reason, rational souls, and recipients for truth* are delivered, have passed away; and we seriously meditate the manner in which they are applied; how indeed must that man be in the scale of intellectual being, who does not discover that all "is but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

LETTER IV.

Every reader of your discourses, must be surprised at the extent to which you have carried the practice of allegorising the Scriptures: you declare your assent to them, and yet in practice, you seem to consider each part as a fable from which you can draw a moral to suit the purpose of the moment; and the belief

which you profess in their divine origin, does not restrain you from indulging in all the licentiousness of fiction. "Sacred History, (says an eminent writer,) has always been read with submissive reverence, and an imagination over-awed and controlled. We have been accustomed to acquiesce in the nakedness and simplicity of the authentic narrative, and to repose on its veracity with such humble confidence, as suppresses curiosity. We go with the historian as he goes, and stop with him when he stops. All amplification is frivolous and vain; all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion, seems not only useless, but is in some degree profane. Such events as were produced by the visible interposition of divine power, are above the power of human genius to dignify. The miracle of Creation, however it may teem with images, is best described with little diffusion of language: *He spake the word and they were made.*"

That an argument may sometimes be illustrated by a moral drawn from the events recorded in Scripture, I do not deny; but I think a pious mind must always indulge in the practice with great caution, and be careful not to make an allegory of the fact itself. Nor do I think that the passage of Scripture "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life"[†] which you so often quote, is at variance with this view of the subject, or can furnish any argument in excuse for the spirit of mysticism by which you involve every part of them in obscurity. It is true that this passage is in the figurative language generally used in the East, but the meaning appears so plain, that only those can mistake it, whose minds have been perverted by the habit of speculating in the airy regions of the imagination. The New Testament is a code of moral law and spiritual instruction, teaching man his duty to his neighbour, and the true way in which he can render acceptable worship to God. For the outward order of this worship, and the government of religious society, certain rules and ordinances must be necessary, and were found to be so, even in the days of the apostles: but as under the old covenant many had been led to consider the outward observance of the law as their *only* duty, and that "if they paid their tithe of mint and anise and cummin,

* Life of Cowley.

† 2 Corinthians, chap. 3.

“ they might omit the weightier matters of the law, judgment “ mercy and faith; although *both* ought to have been observed;”^{*} so this exhortation is intended to caution the flock, not against the observance of the rules of discipline which had been established, but that they might not sink down into the belief that such observance was all that was required; and that they ought always to remember that “ God is a Spirit; and they that “ worship him, must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.”

Now let us see the use you have made of this passage of Scripture, and to how many purposes your inventive fancy has applied it. In your discourse at the meeting house in Germantown,† you enter largely into this subject, but as the passage is too long to be transcribed, I shall endeavour to give the different inferences you draw from it.

First, That from the letter of the Scriptures, every thing suitable to deceive the people can be taken.

Secondly, That as every thing we read in the Scriptures must necessarily be received through our outward senses, they are only fit for the outward creature.

Thirdly, That it was the letter of the Scriptures that led men to the apostacy.

Fourthly, That all that has ever been written, is nothing but that which the wisdom of man has devised.

Fifthly, In your discourse at †Middletown, you say, It is but a shadow which may do for young beginners; and may point them to the right thing.

Had the commentators who have preceded you, possessed such fertility of imagination, their works, voluminous as they are, must have been multiplied to an extent which it is difficult to conceive. Yet after all, you appear at some moments to have a view of the true use of Scripture, and of the meaning of that passage which you have perverted to so many purposes, although you conclude by one of those strange involutions of ideas with which your attempts at illustration so often abound.

You say, §“ All letter written under the influence of God, “ points us back to the place from whence it came, and this is all; “ because as the letter never could be written without the spirit

* Matthew, XXIII.

† Sermons, page 226.

† See sermon at Germantown, page 92.

§ See sermons, page 100.

“which stands above it, the great first cause of all wisdom and knowledge; therefore, unless by the letter we are gathered to the spirit, we cannot see the letter aright, for it is the effect; and when we face the letter we turn our backs upon the cause, just as a man turns his back upon the sun to see his own shadow.”

Here the sentiment is in itself correct, although the conclusion attempted to be drawn by the puerile conceit with which the sentence ends, is in direct opposition to it. The needle points to the pole, and the careful mariner does not turn his back upon it, but with a steady eye keeps it constantly in view as the guide by which alone he can be directed through the trackless ocean: so the Christian pilgrim, with the gospel in his hand, endeavours to explore his way. The book itself contains not that for which he is seeking, but it has been in mercy handed down to him by the inspirations of infinite wisdom, as a landmark to direct him in the way in which he should walk: it has not only taught him the nature and efficacy of spiritual worship, but it affords a standard by which all his thoughts may be tried, and enables him to distinguish between the wanderings of the imagination and the dictates of eternal wisdom. If contrary to the Scriptures, he rejects them; and whatever you may think of the superiority of your two-fold revelations, and the accuracy of your knowledge of the nature and use of right reason, no *reasonable* being who is convinced that the Scriptures were given to us by divine revelation, can believe in the truth of any thing which does not accord with them.

Such a tissue of inconsistencies has seldom been brought together—you say that the Scriptures were written under the inspiration of infinite wisdom, and also assert that they only proceed from the wisdom of man: you consider them as the box of Pandora from which the apostacy was derived, and every thing calculeated to deceive us may be taken; and still continue to recommend them as proper to be read by young beginners in religion: that they, and every thing else that is received by man through his outward senses, is suitable only to the outward creature; and yet you are continually addressing your hearers through these senses, for the purposes of reproof and spiritual instruction.

That passages of Scripture have often been perverted to pur-

poses far different from the spirit and original intention of them, must be admitted by all; and the sources from which these perversions have been derived it is not difficult to conceive.

It was long before any of the outward professors of Christianity had the hardihood to question their authority: they knew that the whole Christian world considered this book as the standard by which their doctrines were to be tested, and whenever their inclinations, or their vices, impelled them to actions contrary to the pure and obvious meaning of gospel ordinances, they sought to veil their aberrations by the perversion of the book itself. The man of the world found in it so many restraints upon his ambition and fancied enjoyments, that it is not surprising that he should be anxious to avail himself of every pretence to enlarge its boundaries and relax the rigour of his bonds. In this struggle, many of the priests¹ were his faithful coadjutors, for they too felt the uneasiness of the straightened path prescribed to them, and that the pure Christian doctrines and principles could afford no field for the indulgence of their vanity by pompous declamation, or for the display of a superiority of mind by subtle disquisition: all was simple and practical, such as fishermen could teach and herdsmen understand.

Then began that system of mysticising and allegorising the Scriptures, a practice which accorded so well with the lively and subtle characters of the modern Greeks, that every priest became a mystagogue, and the pulpit a chair of theological alchymy, from which men were taught "how to reduce divinity to the maxims of the laboratory, explain morality by sal-sulphur and mercury, and allegorize the Scripture itself, and the sacred mysteries thereof, into the Philosopher's Stone."*

Hence the Scriptures became as one of the sibylline books of Paganism, to be opened by the priests alone, for they only could explain the oracles of God; and they acted with more consistency than you have done, by endeavouring to conceal them from the view of the laity; for if they are indeed such as *you* have described, and *they* have strove to make them, they ought not only to be concealed from the view of young beginners in religion, but prohibited to all but the initiated.

* Locke.

Thus was the simplicity of the Christian religion deformed, and the understandings of men subdued by an ambitious priesthood. They knew that gravity and meekness were the attributes and best ornaments of a gospel minister, and while pride and the spirit of domination reigned within them uncontrolled, they sought, by a sanctimonious exterior and affected humility, to prolong their sway; and we find the most imperious of the Roman pontiffs, when treading on the necks of kings, subscribing himself the servant of the servants of God.

I fear you will consider me as presumptuous, yet I must venture to entreat you to examine the course you have been pursuing; to consider whether the habit you have acquired of looking for some hidden novelty in every passage of Scripture, does not prevent you from perceiving its obvious meaning; and whether the manifest inconsistencies in which this practice involves you, is not sufficient proof of your being under the guidance of a different spirit from that which you claim as a director.

I have no disposition to question the uprightness of your motives, but I am fully persuaded that the applause with which you have been surrounded, has given an unhappy bias to your mind; and that if it was under a right direction, you would be enabled to see, that it is not the letter of the Scripture, but the habit, (in which you so largely indulge,) of seeking for meanings other than the letter, which has caused so many false interpretations and divisions among men: that the letter is intended to teach us our moral and spiritual duties, and points out with sufficient clearness the way in which we should walk; and that the nice distinctions and elaborate refinements of the orator, neither have a tendency to enlighten the understandings nor purify the hearts of the audience, though they often gratify the vanity of the one and amuse the imaginations of the other.

LETTER V.

In reading your discourses my attention was particularly engaged by the sermon delivered at Newtown, in Bucks County, and it did seem to me so much at variance with the principles which

induce the Quakers to assemble for public worship, that were there no other evidence, it would be sufficient to prove that you are not under the guidance of that spirit, by which, in former days, their ministers were governed.

That society believe that the great object of such assembling is to endeavour, by shutting out all external things, to discipline the mind to that pure and silent worship and waiting upon God, in which they may experience Christ to be their shepherd and teacher; and although this solemn silence may sometimes be profitably interrupted for the purposes of admonition, instruction and encouragement, yet that no minister can, (when under right direction,) expatiate on topics irrelevant to the subject.

A little examination must, I think, convince us that your sermon, so far from being delivered under such impressions, carries on the face of it, the proof of a mind struggling for distinction: and that in this effort, much has been introduced foreign to the subject on which you professed to treat, and however innocent in itself, very unsuitable to the place, and peculiarly calculated to withdraw the mind from the object for which the assembly were ostensibly gathered.

You commence your sermon by stating your apprehensions that there are individuals who are not sufficiently impressed with the necessity of order and discipline in society, and seem to consider it your duty to convince them of its importance. To a plain understanding this does not appear difficult, for the arguments in favour of it are so palpable, that a very few minutes indeed, would be sufficient to any one not in the habit of multiplying words, to establish it beyond all controversy. You, however, seem never disposed to take the common road: the arguments would be but the repetition of a thrice told tale, and would therefore command no extraordinary attention: they might beget conviction, but would not produce *that effect* upon the audience, which, if not always the object, is so dear to the orator.

But in deviating from the road, you have lost yourself in the wilderness; and such has been your entanglement, that after all the time which you consumed, I am sure there was not an individual present in the meeting, who could tell what you really meant by discipline, how it is to be established, or in what manner it is to be enforced. I form this opinion from having read

the sermon: for with all the advantages of frequent recurrence to particular passages, and of re-perusal, I found it very difficult to form any idea of your meaning: how then could your audience, with none of these advantages, in the very few moments in which they could preserve unbroken the slight concatenation of your ideas, encumbered as they are with references unconnected with the subject, receive any information or instruction from them. If I am correct in my conclusion, and sure I am that no one who heard you can contradict me, it must follow, that being incomprehensible to those to whom it was addressed, it could not proceed from the suggestions of true wisdom.

After a few observations on the subject of discipline, you give to your audience a kind of lecture on astronomy. Had you confined yourself to recalling to their recollection the wonderful harmony in the works of the Almighty, it would not have been incongruous; but to enter into a long dissertation on the sun, moon, and stars, and on vacuum and unmeasured space, was neither adapted to the place or company. It was no doubt quite new and entertaining to such of them as had never read the elementary treatises in use in some of our schools; and it is certainly the most sublime of all sciences, and that in which the powers of the human mind have been displayed in the greatest degree; yet I cannot think you were judicious in selecting a Quaker meeting as a proper theatre for the display of your talents, nor can I believe that your ingenuity can make any application of the facts you have stated to the subject of your discourse. You tell us that the sun, although it emits so much light, never lessens; that there is harmonious and social commune between the heavenly bodies;* that the earth, if kept too long in the cold, would grow heavier, and falling from its proper place, derange the other bodies; that

* This information, I must acknowledge, is an exception to the generality of my assertion, for I do not believe it is contained in any of the elementary books I have mentioned; nor do I think it can be found in the writings of either Newton or Herschell, or that either of them, although so long engaged in examining the planetary system, were so fortunate as to observe any of these bodies, at the moment when they were engaged in these friendly conversations. Perhaps the author has been led into a mistake by some obstruction in his glass, like a celebrated member of the Royal Society, who announced the discovery of an elephant in the moon, which, on examination, was found to be only a mouse in his telescope.

the moon has a great effect upon our globe, &c. &c. The moon, we know, is thought by many to have a considerable influence on the imaginations of men in certain situations, but I never heard that such influence had any effect in producing good order and discipline, and no one supposes that the rays of the sun can throw any light upon the subject. Besides you ought to have recollected that you were subjecting yourself to the charge of ingratitude; for surely the men of science must think you ungrateful in availing yourself so largely of those labours, which you have endeavoured to persuade your friends are a curse to mankind.*

I am not so ignorant of the situation of the Society of Friends, as to be uninformed of the uneasiness which is felt by some of its members under its established rules of order and discipline; and as I know that your preaching was one of the principal causes of it, I did think it of some importance to endeavour to ascertain your opinions on the subject. It was indeed a laborious work to travel through the many pages over which they are dispersed; to remove the various matters with which they were encumbered, and collect the scattered fragments. Yet after all my toil, I found my work not half accomplished. These fragments when brought together, were of such various sizes and colours, so diversified in shape, and heterogeneous in their materials, that it surpassed my skill to arrange them in any way consistent with order and propriety; and if the knowledge of them can afford any instruction, it must be from the striking contrast between their wild deformity, and the rational rules of order and discipline which they are intended to supersede.

You say that all aversion to order and discipline arises from the want of a right knowledge of ourselves: that when we come to this right knowledge, we shall be so perfect in these things, that there will be no contests or divisions among us: that all order and discipline must be fixed by the divine Lawgiver, and that then it cannot be violated; and therefore that all attempts to censure or control a member must proceed from those who counterfeits its meaning, in order to *lord* it over others: that each member of society is in himself a little world, which, if kept in right

* Sermons, page 53 and 55.

order and subjection, all would be harmony and discipline; but, when this is not the case, all attempts to enforce them tend to increase the confusion: that we all have the law within ourselves, therefore order and discipline must never be contrived by mortals: that the Quaker discipline is unsound, because it is in the letter; but that there are some true Quakers, and that each of these has all discipline and order within himself.

Now what is all this? Is it not a second growth of that *Fungus* which was engendered in the hot bed of fanaticism many years past; and has not the sober sense of the humble Christian, or the wit and humour of a Butler, been able to eradicate it from the soil of the Christian church? Are we again to have among us those men above ordinances, who mistake confusion for order, and the destruction of our faith for the consummation of religion?

These questions must present themselves to every mind when examining your opinions; for, when stripped of all glosses, and exhibited in their genuine colours, they mean that all written rules of order and discipline are restraints upon the liberty of the saints: that no rules should be established by men, for that every man has the rule written in his own heart, and that there alone he is accountable.

That no man is accountable to another for his religious belief, and that every man has a right to worship in the way which he may believe most acceptable to his Creator, are undeniable truths; but as the different Christian sects have congregated on account of a unity in their religious tenets, and assemble together for the purpose of uniting in divine worship, they have a right, and, (if they are firm in their belief,) it is their duty, to establish such rules and regulations as will best preserve their religion in, what they believe to be, its greatest purity; and in an especial manner to prevent the preaching of doctrines adverse to it. And this is no infringement of the liberty of conscience; for any man who dissents from their doctrines may separate himself from them; he may unite himself with any other sect; or if, in his career, his spiritual knowledge has set him above all ordinances, he may erect his own standard, and, unrestrained by forms and unfettered by creeds, he may give the utmost strain to his imagination, and perhaps become himself the head of a sect. But no casuistry

can justify, or pretence excuse a man, who continues to be ostensibly the member of a religious community, for the purpose of undermining its principles or destroying the belief in its tenets. Let him believe them erroneous and the substitutes he offers unquestionably true; it alters not the case. The source will be impure, and the waters which flow from it, tainted.

If the mind can be brought to conceive the possibility of the existence of a society formed according to your rules and orders of discipline, it must present itself to the imagination in all the sublime confusion of another chaos—you may offer yourself to explain the word of God, and you will be reminded that this is all in the letter: you may tell them that the Scriptures may be read to advantage, when all things in them have been previously revealed;* and they may reply, that reading them will then be quite unnecessary—you may exhort them to assemble together for the purpose of divine worship, “for that then we should be “instructed what to do, and how to bring our offerings, to be “handed over to the priest, so that they may be made acquainted “with our state, and may preach the true gospel to us;”† and they may tell you “that such assemblies are not the places to “gather spiritual food.”‡ If you are asked why you waste so much time in preaching, you will tell them “the reason is plain; “that although the letter directs us to the law, and nothing else “can teach us, yet we flee from it; and therefore outward instructions are raised up and clothed with power:”§ and they may reply that this is also the letter, and “that the Lord is too kind “to send them away for instruction; and that he is always present, a schoolmaster to every soul.”|| If you explain to them your own growth and experience in spiritual knowledge, they will ask you of what use it can be to them, and tell you, “that each “individual requires a law peculiar to himself; and that the law “of the Spirit of Life in one, is not the law of the Spirit of Life “in another”¶—and if, (adopting this opinion,) you should declare to them that the law of the Spirit of Life is different in each individual, some of your audience may assert, “that the “divine law which is written by the finger of God upon the “tablet of our hearts, is the same to every individual”***—and if

* Sermons, page 313.

† Sermons, page 248.

‡ Sermons, page 275

§ Page 52.

|| Sermons, page 51.

¶ Sermons, page 51.

*** Sermons in New York, page 124.

fatigued with these objections, you should express your surprise at their number, inconsistency and futility, you will be told that they are all furnished by yourself.

If, then, the great founder of the sect is yet so indistinct in his vision, what must be the situation of those who are less advanced in the religious experience of your new school? If he is so frequently involved in contradictions, what must be the accumulated mass when collected together?

Should your project be realised, and such a congregation assembled, those who, like yourself, search the Scriptures for types and figures, may, with much less violation of probability than occurs in your discourses, consider the meeting as a consummation of that confusion of tongues typified in the building of the Tower of Babel.

LETTER VI.

THE extraordinary and unhesitating confidence with which you state your opinions, even on the most important and solemn subjects, and the air of authority with which you endeavour to enforce them, is in such striking contrast to that humility and reverence with which we are accustomed to hear such subjects treated, that it naturally excites some suspicion that there are views and feelings in the mind of the preacher not in accordance with that meek and quiet spirit which is the necessary qualification of a Christian teacher: and when we turn from the tone and manner of the discourse to some of the opinions delivered, I am afraid that suspicion will ripen into certainty, and that there will be too much evidence of a mind not habituated to reflections on its own infirmities, but proud* in its acquirements, and vaunting in its own strength. For we find you glorying in the ability to withstand the enemy of your peace, and gratifying yourself with the honour to be derived from the victory.† In this elevation of

* Sermons, page 68. "I challenge the whole host of mankind."

† Sermons, page 231.

mind you say, that it would be a debasement to man, were he placed by the Almighty in a situation from which he could not fall;* and that had we been content to remain in a state of innocence, we should have continued to be but as mere machines.† To rely on any other than your own exertions you think degrading, and would not accept the sacrifice which is offered for your sins by the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.‡

We are, indeed, placed in a state of probation, surrounded with temptations and perplexed with dangers: we have before us the prospect of a change into a never-ending state, and that state is promised to be one of endless felicity to those who, with a sincere and humble heart, seek the God of Israel for their portion. To such, and such alone, is promised *the exceeding great reward*; and, though it is our duty to acquiesce, without repining, in our station and allotment here, temeracious indeed must that man be, who, with such a prize before him, would, for the gratification which the honour of a victory over his own evil propensities might afford, prefer the hazardous contest to that state of innocence with which our first parents were blessed before the fall; and confident indeed must he be in his own merits, if he rejects the offer of an intercessor, and relies on them alone for a fund not only to redeem his errors here, but to purchase the rich inheritance of eternal happiness.

Such a state of mind alone could conceive the singular idea of opening an account current with the Creator,§ and call it religion; to ask a record of our sins, and boldly claim our offsets; and to rely on the accumulated balance of our own works: to gain the prize of everlasting life from the justice and not from the mercy of the Almighty, and not to pray with David, “have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, *blot out my transgressions.*”

Such an account would indeed be a novelty: there is no difficulty in filling the debtor side of the ledger: the melancholy list of man’s frailties and vices furnish ample materials; but, from whence the mighty balance reserved for the great purchase should

* Sermons, page 231.

† Letter to Doctor Shoemaker.

‡ Sermons, pages 230, 231.

§ Sermons, page 44.

arise is not easily to be conceived. Let us figure to ourselves a man not immured in sloth or sunk in wickedness, but one whose march through life has been in the path of propriety and virtue, arranging his account,

I have lived a life of temperance,
regularity and virtue.

I have been, through life, frugal and
industrious.

I have been humane and charitable
to the poor and needy.

I have been a good husband and a
careful and tender father.

And if he could add, I have gone
about preaching to, and exhorting
large assemblies of people in thy
name.

Thou hast been blessed with the
enjoyment of health.

Thou hast acquired wealth.

I gave thee the fat of the land.

Thy wife has been virtuous and
faithful, and thy children a blessing
to thee.

May not the answer sometimes be,
And hast thou not been richly re-
warded by the incense of flattery and
applause which thou hast received.

Here, then, is no balance; virtue is generally rewarded in this life; and, if the Christian is to look for redemption, is it not "by standing fast and holding to the traditions which we have been taught," by which we shall know that as all have sinned and fallen short, so we can only be justified by grace * "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

You may say that your idea of opening an account with the Creator was only by way of illustration, but what does it illustrate? Is our situation with our Creator such, that works are sufficient to insure our salvation? and do you believe that if † "in looking over the leaf and seeing where the balance strikes," we should find it to be in our favour, we may indulge in sin and iniquity until the balance is brought to an equilibrium? Do not you believe in the efficacy of repentance, and that the truly repentant sinner may receive remission of his sins, although it may be in the eleventh hour, and when they are of a crimson colour, or a scarlet dye?

The idea is indeed cold and heartless; in sentiment most de-

* Romans, 3d Chap.

† Sermons, p. 45.

grading, and in its deductions most pernicious. How different from the inspirations of the man of old, when musing on the sacred mount of Zion, or on the banks of Shiloh's stream fast, by the oracles of God, he saw the dawn of that auspicious day, when HE, our promise would appear to blot out our transgressions and redeem us from our sins—and with what holy rapture did he announce the joyful tidings? "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son. Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The sun shall be no more thy light by day: neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

But this is not the Messiah of whom you preach: yours is like yourself, a peccable man clothed with infirmities and liable to transgression; and who, so far from having the power to give salvation to others, was himself tempted to sin.* You profess to believe that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life," but in direct opposition to the plain intent and purport of the sentence, you declare it only means that he had power to cure

* Sermons, p. 253. E. Hicks says, "He, (Jesus,) was tempted in all points as we are. Now how could he be tempted if he had been fixed in a state of perfection in which he could not turn aside. Could you suppose as rational beings that such a being could be tempted? No, not any more than God could be tempted. Perfection is perfection, and cannot be tempted, it is impossible." Here is an evident perversion of the Scriptures; for we nowhere find that Jesus yielded to temptation; and it is a most irrational conclusion, that because there was a tempter he was subject to temptation; and so far from such attempts evincing that *he was not perfect and could turn aside*, the resistance and reproof of the tempter proves, (and was probably intended to prove,) the very reverse. It is one thing to be tempted, and another to yield to temptation, and E. Hicks could not have forgotten that the authority from which he drew his account of the temptations likewise declares that though Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Heb. 4. 15. By E. Hicks's erroneous construction of the sentence, he could with equal ease prove the fallibility of the Almighty, for the Scriptures in several places speak of His being tempted by the people.

outward diseases and give strength of body to enjoy the good things of this life;* that for this only was he sent, and his power was but as a figure or shadow of the great Comforter. But even with this perversion, the facts you state will not support your argument. It is true that Jesus Christ healed the diseases of individuals; but surely no rational being can suppose that such was the object of his mission, for the number of the healed was so small that it could have had no perceptible effect on the general outward health of mankind, or even of the particular people to whom he appeared.

You say you believe that the Scriptures were written by divine inspiration, and that Jesus did nothing "but as he received power and command from His heavenly Father;"† and these Scriptures tell us that when the Pharisees began to reason and said "who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus answered, is it "easier to say thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the *Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins*, he said unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee arise, and take up thy couch and go unto thine house: and immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house glorifying God."‡

Here we have a plain historical narration, from which it is evident that the sick was healed to convince an unbelieving people, by an act of supernatural power perceptible to their senses, that Jesus was clothed with authority to forgive sins. You however say it was a figure or shadow, and as these terms are often in your mouth, it may be proper to enquire whether you understand their true meaning, and whether by any possible construction of language they can be considered as illustrative of your view of the subject. They are here used as synonymous, and mean *the expression of an idea by resemblances*: if I speak of persons in the morning of life, I am understood to mean youth; and if I say, the king of day is rising in the east, every body understands it to mean the sun; and there are other figurative resemblances more obscure, but no one can, without violating every principle of reason, attempt to adduce as authority for, and illustrative of his opinions, expressions which so far from resembling

* Sermons, p. 50.

† New York Sermons, p. 97.

‡ Luke, chap. 5th.

are in direct opposition to them, merely because he chooses to call them figurative.

If indeed there are any individuals who believe they can perceive any resemblance between your inferences and the facts; and that when Jesus said he healed the sick, in order that the Pharisees might know that he had power on earth to forgive sins, he meant it only as a figure, and that he claimed authority only as to the cure of outward diseases; their conclusion must be arrived at by a process which the uninitiated do not understand: and if your argument is according to the *analogy of reason*, it cannot be of that reason which arrives at the truth by observation and deduction, but the reason of your new school of metaphysics, which discerns *without reflection* all things at first sight.*

Were you reading a letter informing you that a friend had departed on a journey, riding on a black horse, and was told by one of your auditors that the expression was figurative and that he meant a white cow, you would probably laugh; and yet the incongruity is not greater than some of your own discoveries. For instance, Paul said "let your women keep silence in your churches;" and you observe that all who *are truly enlightened* will understand that the woman means the selfish spirit which ought not to be permitted to speak in churches; but you have forgot to tell us how to apply the succeeding observation that "if they will learn any thing they must consult their husbands at home." Nor is it probable that Paul, (although a bachelor,) was so uncharitable as to believe the selfish spirit so identified with woman, as to render her a proper emblem of it.

In this instance Paul was recommending a rule of conduct, and ought to be allowed to speak for himself: so thought Robert Barclay, and in accounting for the exhortation he has given the probable reason of it. He considered it neither as an allegory or a figure; but he had not arrived at that degree of spiritual knowledge which enabled him to discover in every page of the Bible a meaning in direct contradiction to the plain and obvious sense of the written language. Religion was with him not an occult science, nor the Bible a caballistick book which can never be read to advantage until the truths contained in it have been

* Sermons, p. 207.

previously revealed to us.* On the contrary, he believed with the Apostle Paul "that these things were written for our learning," that "the holy scriptures are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus," and that †"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work."

LETTER VII.

When the early Quakers, dissatisfied with the formal worship of the existing protestant church, separated themselves and formed a society of their own, they were reproached by some with denying the authenticity of the sacred writings, and by others with setting up their own inspirations in opposition to them; and they seem at an early period to have discovered the necessity of recording their belief on this subject, not only to refute the calumnies circulated by their opponents, but as a guide to the inexperienced of their own sect. For, such was the ferment of men's minds at that moment, and the violence of the change from the dull uniformity of formal belief, to all the extravagancies of unrestrained enthusiasm, that it appeared like an epidemic affecting all descriptions of people; and their imaginations became so exalted, that every fancy was mistaken for a revelation, and every preacher, however wild his doctrines, had his followers. Nor did their own members wholly escape the infection; for with all their care, there were those among them who indulged in extravagancies, to the great grief of their more sober friends.

It fell to the lot of Robert Barclay to record the doctrines of the early Quakers, and none of them was better fitted for the task; for he was learned and pious, clear in his perceptions and logical in his arrangement, and well able to give his reasons for his faith. He knew that superstition and fanaticism were the

* Sermons, p. 313.

† 2nd Timothy, Chap. 3d.

Seylla and Charybdis of religion, and how much care was necessary to prevent us, while avoiding the one, from being swept into the whirlpool of the other. He was surrounded by instances of the unhappy effects of that exaltation of mind, which induced individuals to believe they had arrived at such an unerring state of spiritual knowledge, that the recorded opinions and advice of their pious predecessors, and even the scriptures, (being only in the letter,) were to them neither authority nor a guide; and that they had derived the fulness of knowledge from the fountain itself. That to them reason itself had ceased to be of use, since they were under the constant influence of a clear and distinct revelation, as stable and certain as any of the instincts of our nature: and such was the fever of the brain, that when their prophecies were contradicted by the event, it did not impair their confidence in their own inspirations, *because it was the Lord who chose to deceive them, and they were deceived.*

He had not adopted the fantastical idea that every passage of scripture has a mystical meaning; but declares them to be the revelations of the spirit of God to the saints, and that they contain a faithful historical account of the actings of God's people in various ages; a prophetic account of several things, whereof some have passed, and some to come; and a full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ. That they are profitable for correction and instruction in righteousness, and that *divine inward revelations can never contradict the outward testimony of the scriptures, or sound reason.*

Here all is plain and consistent. No man of sound mind can believe that the revelations of infinite wisdom are ever contradictory; and as the evidence of the divine origin of the scriptures is such as no individual can produce, he was warranted in his conclusion, that all pretensions of the spirit in contradiction to them, are delusions of the devil. And indeed no man of observation can cast his eyes round him, and contemplate the various illusions into which the human mind is seduced on religious subjects, without perceiving the absolute necessity of a standard or rule by which its wanderings may be checked and its aberrations corrected, and we find Locke concurring with Barclay, in stating the scripture revelations and right reason, as the true standards by which our faith is to be tried.

You also seem to perceive the necessity of some check, but in the very spirit which induces that necessity, your own standard is as visionary, and as fruitful a source of evil, as the propensity it is intended to correct; for yours is not that reason which proceeds from premises to consequences, but an actual illusion, which has persuaded you that there is a reason which can see all things immediately and by intuition;* and your bible, a book written in cypher,† the key of which is one of the most vigorous plants of the wilderness of fanaticism. Hence it follows, that your standard, so far from being a true test or corrector of your opinions, must always, when used, confirm you in error; for it is a magnifying mirror, reflecting the exaggerated image of the delusion it is intended to control.

There is not a more prolific source of error, than assuming principles without a careful examination of their correctness, and drawing conclusions from them; and even when the principle is correct, and the inference fairly deducible, men in the ardour of their zeal, often push it to an extreme far beyond its just limits.

It is not difficult to conceive, that a man whose mind is convinced by internal evidence of the truth of the christian religion, and who, under an awful impression of its incalculable importance, opens the sacred volume, finds more instruction and comfort in it, than he who only reads it as history, or from an indistinct sense of duty; because he has a greater degree of inward acquaintance with the same spirit and work in the heart. But this simple exposition is too plain to satisfy the lofty imaginations of the high professors of the present day: because the lukewarm and indifferent do not receive the same instruction and profit from the scriptures as the more serious and pious, the perusal can afford them no benefit; and even to the sincere inquirer it is a sealed book, until its contents are previously communicated by an especial revelation.‡

This is the doctrine you have preached, and yet your own practice proves that you have no reliance on it; and that it was only one of those inconsiderate excursions, in which the orator, when not under the strict control of duty or reason, too often indulges; for when, in your cooler moments, you wished to instruct

* Sermons, page 207.

† Sermons, page 313.

‡ Sermons, page 313.

your mind on the subject of our Saviour's birth, you sought it, not only by reading the scriptures, but also by consulting the traditions of the christian church, as recorded by one of its historians.*

These are the inconsistencies to which extravagance always leads; for when the mind, tired of its aerial flight, revisits the earth, and is again employed in its proper duties, it finds that practical objects can only be attained by practicable means.

Exaggeration in public speaking is always blameable, and in the preacher particularly objectionable: it is generally resorted to for the purpose of increasing the impression, but seldom produces that effect; and it is upon religious subjects, above all others, that amplification should be avoided, and that pure and simple style adopted which admits of no adventitious ornaments.

You, however, pursue a different course, and by the extravagance of your epithets, not only defeat your own views, but sometimes occasion the subject itself to be considered, if not with ridicule, at least with but little seriousness. Thus in speaking of the propriety of plainness in apparel, instead of giving the simple and obvious reason why the Society of Friends adopted it, you consider it as a vital principle of religion; and you mistake, (to use your own favourite expression,) the effect for the cause, when you exclaim that there is religion in clothing, and exaggerate beyond all bounds, when you declare, that all the sin in the world is created by men's following foolish fashions: and when you seriously assure us that high-crowned hats were never devised in the wisdom of God, the obvious inference that low-crowned hats were, is so ludicrous, that we should be tempted to laugh, were not all merriment on a subject in which that sacred name is introduced, (however improperly,) incongruous, if not profane.†

Again, in speaking of the necessity of a living faith in God, you exclaim that, faith in creeds and the traditions of your fathers, is worse than nothing; that we had better have no faith at all, for it is no better than the faith of devils; and in confirmation of this rash assertion, you quote a passage of scripture which has not the most remote application to the subject.‡

* Letter to Thomas Willis.

† Sermons, page 133.

‡ Sermons, page 293.

To this, no rational christian can ever assent: he believes in the necessity of spiritual worship, and that all ought to feel the power of religion in their own souls: but that the faith which is derived from the lessons of a pious parent, although it may not be accompanied with that degree of spiritual knowledge which it ought to be our endeavour to attain, is no better than the faith of devils, no man in his sober senses can believe.

You would no doubt think me very daring were I to say that your own faith is as bad as the faith of devils; and yet, admitting the truth of your own assertion, I can prove it by testimony, which, to you at least, ought to be conclusive. For in your letter to Thomas Willis, before alluded to, you declare your belief in the Scripture account of our Saviour's birth from your *reliance on tradition*, although it is contrary to your judgment. If then that faith which a child admits and believes to be true from a firm reliance on the wisdom and experience of a pious father, is as bad as the faith of devils; how are we to describe the faith of that man who gives to tradition such supreme control, as to make a reliance on it a point of duty, although a belief in it, is contrary to his deliberate judgment.

This is one of the instances of the wanderings of your imagination, and the strange inconsistencies into which your metaphysical divinity leads you: and I cite it as a proof of the pernicious consequences of substituting mystical reveries in the place of the simple religion taught by Jesus Christ; and not to censure your reliance on the faith of your predecessors: for I truly believe that did you, like many of them, endeavour to preserve your mind in that meek and lowly state recommended by His example and precepts, all propensity to curious speculation on hidden things would be suppressed, and when called to testify to your faith, you would be ready "always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with *meekness and fear*."

In alluding to the reasons which prevent many Friends from taking a part in the governments of the earth, instead of ascribing them to that peaceable principle which does not permit them to be agents in any measures connected with war, you denounce the governments of this world as standing *eternally* in opposition to the government of the God of heaven; and this because all

laws made in the wisdom of man are foolishness with God: yet you acknowledge them to be necessary, although you say it is no reason why the law of the Almighty should not prevail, which would take away the necessity of all other laws.*

This reasoning is as confused, as the conclusion to which it leads is extraordinary. How laws in opposition to the will of the Almighty can be necessary, when there is no reason why his law should not prevail, you have not explained; and if human governments are in eternal opposition to the government of God, and yet are necessary, then is there not only a necessity for man's being in eternal opposition to God's will; but the necessity is a justification of it, and your argument, if sound, affords a complete vindication of the persons engaged in the administration of those governments.

We need not be told that if all men were under the strict influence of virtue and religion, most of the existing laws would be unnecessary, because they are enacted in consequence of the vices and frailties of man; but that such a state of things will ever exist on earth, in which all regulations and covenants of society may with safety and convenience be abolished, is an idea too extravagant to require refutation. Nor can it be believed that all laws made by the wisdom of man, are foolishness with God, in the sense in which you understand it. The Creator in his wisdom seems to have ordained that the improvement of man in this state of being should be progressive. The first step is associating in societies, and they necessarily require rules for their government; and as they multiply, new circumstances are continually arising, which require additional regulations. And herein that reason with which man alone, of all created beings, has been favoured, is properly applied: for this it was given to him, and its application to the purposes for which it was originally intended, can never be foolishness in the sight of the Almighty. The scriptures indeed tell us that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; but it is used in reference to our religious duties; to teach us the vanity of building up systems for ourselves, and pretending to explain the hidden things of Omnipotence; and to warn us that "as it is the gospel that has brought life and immortality to light," so "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."†

* Sermons, p. 198.

† Corinthians, Chap. 3d.

LETTER VIII.

WHEN we consider the ingenuity of the mind of man, in drawing inferences from propositions to suit his present passions and prejudices, and how often they are perverted to the most injurious purposes, every person of reflection must admit that it is of the most serious importance that the ministers of religion should be extremely guarded in the terms they use, and not suffer a sentence to escape from their lips without a careful examination of its bearing and tendency. Nor is it any justification of such persons, although they may with truth assert that the pernicious deductions drawn from their declarations were not intended by them, if such deductions can fairly be made.

These reflections were impressed upon my mind in reading your sermons, in which are to be found many assertions which appear to me to have a very injurious tendency; and with whatever views they were uttered, (for I inquire not into your motives,) seem to strike at the very foundation of revealed religion.

In your vain attempts to describe the nature of the Almighty, we should be induced to believe, from some of your expressions, that you had adopted the opinion of some sects of unbelieving philosophers, that God is not the governor, but the soul of the universe; not a Being, but a principle or element, which, although it acts efficaciously, implies the absence of all personal agency. For you say, "Every child of God *has the full and complete nature, spirit, and, may I not say, the divinity of God Almighty*; because there is nothing but divinity in God, and "therefore, if they are partakers of his divine nature,* so far they "are partakers of his divinity, according to the portion which he "is pleased to dispense: and he *must* dispense that portion which "will make them like himself. *For his children are as much*

* This is not the doctrine or belief of the Society. They believe in a divine principle of light and life, wherewith Christ hath enlightened every man that cometh into the world; but *by this they understand, not the proper essence and nature of God precisely taken, who is not divisible into parts and measures, but is a pure and simple being, void of all composition and division.* See BARCLAY.

*"like their Almighty Father, as the children of men are like their fathers."**

In speaking of the operation of the great first Cause, you compare it to the sun: "What, (you say,) would become of us, were it not for the enlivening beams of the sun? Although it emits so much, yet it never lessens.† Our immortal spirits receive all their light from that celestial and invisible Sun which is the Creator of all things. *He emits of his excellency to us, yet he does not lessen, but remains eternally the same, for all that comes from him will return to him.*"‡

Consistent with this idea, you totally reject the Scripture declarations respecting heaven and the kingdom of God, and consider them only as a condition of the mind, and that we can enjoy them in this state of being.

In alluding to the account of the apostle's being taken up into the third heaven, you say, "What is this third heaven but a three-fold manifestation of the divine presence;"§ and you ask, "Is heaven of so little value to us that we put it off till the day of our death?"|| "We are led to believe that there is an opportunity to lay up treasure in heaven; that is, to be in possession of heavenly treasure; or, *to use a more proper expression, to be in possession of heaven*; because heaven is a state; it is every where where God is;"¶ "God comes alike into the hearts of all the children of men, as much in the fornicator, the thief, and the liar, as in me. But there it is dead, because the creature is in opposition to God."** "Now this leading by the spirit of God is the same as the kingdom of God, and being subject to the

* New York Sermons, page 130.

† Philadelphia Sermons, page 187.

‡ Philadelphia Sermons, page 188.

§ Sermons, page 17.

|| Sermons, page 76.

¶ Sermons, page 275-6.—In one of his sermons, (page 292,) the preacher declares that God never set Jesus Christ above us, "*because if he did he would be partial.*" In this, he sets himself above Christ by undertaking to correct his erroneous notion of heaven. Christ, in his Sermon on the Mount, says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." This *humble teacher* says the proper expression would be "to be in possession of heaven, because heaven is a state, and every where, where God is."

** Sermons, page 292.

"leaven. They are still one and the same thing; they are not two things; and as we yield to the leaven it leavens us, and brings us into the divine nature, so that *we come to partake of the nature of God.*"*

It is an observation of Doctor Paley, that contrivance is a proof of the personality of the Deity; and we have been accustomed to contemplate with admiration and awe the stupendous works of creation as emanating from his wisdom and will. But you, in strict accordance with the notion to which I have alluded, seem not to admit the argument, or the fact on which it is founded; for, in speaking of the earth's revolving in its orbit, you say, "So it has been through all ages past, and so it will continue through the *eternal* ages to come."† "As the moon receives all its light from the sun, for itself in the first place, so by that means it is enabled to emit a part of the power received to the next orb; and here the heavenly order is kept up—so it has been through all the previous *eternal* ages, and so it will continue to all future ages."‡

Is this Christianity, or is it not a renewal of the old doctrines of Pagan philosophy? They held that matter is eternal, although they did not think with you that our system had existed through all eternity. Plato believed the world to be the work of God out of existing matter; but it was the general belief of the learned at a period preceding the coming of Jesus Christ, (as it appears to be your's,) that the soul of man is an emission of the divine nature, and that all are partakers of it—and from hence they drew the natural, and indeed unavoidable inference, that as God is immortal and the soul of man a part of him, it must necessarily have existed from all eternity.

This idea, so incompatible with God's moral government, completely excludes the doctrine of rewards and punishments; for if "all that comes from him must return to him, and is part of his nature," how can the soul, when absorbed in the divine essence, be rewarded for its virtues or punished for its vices practised on earth.

So far from being alarmed at this conclusion, you appear to have adopted both the idea and the inference; for you say, "to

* Sermons, page 295. † Sermons, page 188. ‡ Sermons, page 193.

“be in the image of God we must partake of his own nature, and
 “have a portion of his own blessed spirit *to animate the soul*
*“and make it immortal, as God is immortal.”**

Hence it must follow, that if the only immortal part in man is the portion of the blessed Spirit of which he is the partaker, and that this is a part of the nature of God, it must be bestowed equally on the good and the wicked, or that no part of the latter can be immortal; and this extraordinary consequence must result, that *worship in spirit* is not the homage of man to his Creator, but the Divinity adoring himself.†

Socrates alone, of all the ancient philosophers, had adopted the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments; and the reason why he arrived at this truth, affords an instructive lesson to the metaphysical preachers of the present day—he confined himself to the study of morality. “What, (says an eminent writer,) could be the cause of his belief, but this restraint, of which his belief was the natural consequence? For, having confined himself to morals, he had nothing to mislead him; whereas, the rest of the philosophers, applying themselves with a kind of fanaticism to physics and metaphysics, had drawn a number of absurd but subtle conclusions, which directly opposed the consequences of those moral arguments.”‡

And the great Newton, in reference to this subject, finishes his principles of natural philosophy with these reflections:—“This most elegant frame of things could not have arisen, unless by the contrivance and direction of a wise and powerful being: and if the fixed stars are the centres of systems, these systems must be similar; and all these, constructed according to the same plan, are subject to the government of *one Being*. All

* Sermons, page 66.

† As much you pull Religion's altars down,
 By owning all things God, as owning none:
 For should all beings be alike divine,
 Of worship, if an object you assign,
 God to himself must veneration show,
 Must be the object and the votary too;
 And their assertions are alike absurd,
 Who own no God, or none to be adored.

‡ Warburton.

“ these he governs, *not as the soul of the world*, but as the Lord of all; and therefore, on account of his government, he is called the Lord God; for God is a relative term, and refers to subjects. Deity is God’s government, not of his own body, as those think who consider him as the soul of the world, but of his servants. The supreme God is a *Being*, eternal, infinite, and absolutely perfect. But a being, however perfect, without government is not God; for we say my God, your God, the God of Israel. We cannot say my Eternal, my Infinite. We may have some notions, indeed, of his attributes, but can have none of his nature. With respect to bodies, we see only shapes and colour, hear only sounds, touch only surfaces. These are attributes of bodies, but of their essence we know nothing. As a blind man can form no notion of colours, we can form none of the manner in which God perceives, and understands, and influences every thing.

“ Therefore, we know God only by his attributes. What are these? The wise and excellent contrivance, structure, and final aim of all things. In these his perfections we admire him, and we wonder. In his direction or government, we venerate and worship him—we worship him as his servants; for God without dominion, without providence, and final aims, is *Fate*—not the object either of reverence, of hope, of love, or of fear.”

You may say that you never intended to inculcate such doctrines as I have alluded to, and you can produce various instances in which you have described the Almighty as the supreme governor of the universe; and if these facts are a justification of the course you have pursued, you may continue your career completely sheltered from censure or reproach; for I cannot observe a single novelty in your opinions, or deviation from the established doctrines of the Christian church, which have not been contradicted by yourself.

But such an excuse cannot be availing; you declare that you dare not speak at random, otherwise you would show that you departed from *God’s illuminating spirit*; and although those who have had an opportunity to read and compare your different sermons, can contemplate that solemn declaration with no other than feelings of astonishment and regret at the strange delusion, with others it may have a different effect. You are a travelling

preacher, scattering one doctrine here, and another there; and interlarding your discourses with bold assertions, which are remembered, when the prolix and visionary distinctions by which you attempt to qualify them are forgotten.

I remember hearing an individual who had attended at a meeting in the vicinity of Philadelphia, at which you preached, when asked what was the subject of your discourse, reply, that you preached very comfortable doctrine for some of the company, for you had assured them there was no devil. I am not so uncharitable as to believe that you are intentionally instrumental in removing the salutary restraints upon the vices of man; and yet I am surprised that you do not perceive the inevitable and pernicious consequences of such declarations; and that, if you do not believe in the authority of the Scriptures yourself, you do not avoid assertions which, while they can have no tendency to strengthen and encourage the pious mind, must necessarily diminish those feelings of future responsibility which, awful as they are, unhappily are not sufficient to restrain the wickedness of man.*

Many to whom you preach are illiterate, and without capacity to investigate your doctrines and their tendency. They have been accustomed to listen to the simple truths of our religion, enforced in language which they can understand; and they often found in their attendance at places of worship, consolation, instruction, and encouragement. They have been taught to believe in the revelations unfolded in the sacred volume, and to look forward with the cheering hope, of a Mediator and Redeemer, "who ever liveth to make intercession for them."†

These are the lessons of practical piety, which bring the mind into a situation to worship acceptably, and under the influence of which, men but little instructed in human learning, are often enabled to counsel the wise of this world in the things that lead to their peace.

But if these things are all to be changed: if in place of this

* If the reader wishes to know what Elias Hicks says on this subject, let him peruse the Sermons, pages 37, 163, 166, 170, 182, and 293, and he will there have a fair specimen of the darkness which surrounds him—a cloud of words unilluminated by a ray of light.

† Hebrews, chap. vii.

simple, practical religion, our places of worship are to be converted into theatres for metaphysical disquisitions, and the discussion of questions more curious than useful; and we are to be instructed in the unprofitable controversies which have so long perplexed and disturbed the christian world: if faith is no longer a christian principle, and the revelations of the scriptures rejected when not to be arrived at by the analogy of reason, then indeed must the Quaker ministry be constituted anew, and even your own labours cease. The old and unchanged servants can take no part or portion in the new order of things; and it cannot be expected that the disciples of the new school will take for a master to lead them to the truth by analogous reasoning, one, who has yet to be taught what reason really is.

LETTER IX.

Your assertion that "you cannot believe what you do not understand," is often quoted by your followers, as a proof of your having emancipated yourself from the thralldom of tradition, and risen superior to those prejudices, which early education, and the authority of antiquity have fastened on the minds of men; and yet when we examine and compare this assertion with the doctrines you inculcate, it appears evident that you have not a correct idea of the meaning of your favourite maxim.

This understanding can only be arrived at by the natural faculties of perception, judgment, and reasoning, and as the truth of the especial revelations of which you speak, are propositions which cannot be demonstrated by the use of these faculties; they must, if assented to, be purely matters of faith, arising from our belief in the general truth of the christian dispensation.

There is a clear distinction between things which are according to, above, and contrary to, reason. The first are propositions, the truth of which may be discovered by the use of the ideas we have acquired from sensation and reflection. The second are propositions whose truth cannot be investigated by these means; and

the third, such as are inconsistent and irreconcilable to our clear and distinct ideas.

Thus, were you to tell us, that without other impulse than your own *will*, you can give mobility to matter, and at your pleasure reduce it to a quiescent state, we cannot withhold our assent, because we see you exercising that dominion in the government of your limbs; and yet so far from understanding the operation of this wonderful power, the mind cannot form the least idea how the effect is produced. But when we hear you declare to one set of people "that the law of the spirit of life in one, is not the law of the spirit of life in his brother; and that each individual requires a peculiar law to himself;"* and to another, "that this divine law which is written by the finger of God upon the tablet of our hearts, is the same to every individual;"† we know that these contradictory assertions cannot both be true; and must withhold our belief when you declare "that you dare not speak at random, otherwise you should show that you departed from God's illuminating spirit;" because our reason will never permit us to believe that such inconsistencies can proceed from the illuminations of infinite wisdom.

"Reason," (says Locke,) "is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of Light, and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties. *Revelation* is natural reason, enlarged by a new set of discoveries, communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proof it gives that they come from God." And he rebukes the presumption of those who reduce the measure of their belief to the narrow limits of their own understanding, and declares "it is an over-valuing of ourselves, to reduce all to the narrow measure of our capacities; and to conclude all things impossible to be done, whose manner of doing exceeds our comprehension. This is to make our comprehension *infinite*, or God *finite*, when what he can do, is limited to what we can conceive of it. If you do not understand the operations of your own finite mind, that thinking thing, within you, do not deem it strange, that you cannot comprehend the operations of that

* Philadelphia Sermons, page 51.

† New York Sermons, page 124.

“eternal, infinite mind, who made and governs all things, and whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.”

If a Socinian tells me that he cannot assent to any doctrine which is not on a level with the comprehension of the human understanding, he is at least intelligible; for he necessarily rejects the doctrine of inspiration: but when you make the same assertion, and yet declare that God is incomprehensible to us as rational creatures, and that all the aids which science and philosophy can give, can never bring man to believe rightly in God,* and that it is by his inward manifestations only that we can discover the path of our duty; the assertions are evidently incompatible; and if any deduction can be drawn from them, it is, that the indications by which alone we are taught aright, we are not bound to believe.

Reduce your argument to a syllogism, and reflect on the result.

Prop. I. We cannot believe any thing which the human understanding cannot comprehend.

Prop. II. Science and philosophy, and all the knowledge which man can derive from his natural faculties, can never bring him to comprehend or believe rightly in God.

Conclusion. As it is impossible for man to believe any thing which the human understanding cannot comprehend, and he not being able by the aid of these faculties to comprehend or believe rightly in God, it is impossible for him to comprehend or believe rightly in God.

Suppose, (and I think it actually the case,) that you do not perceive the extent to which your assertion leads, and that you intended to convey the idea that we are not to believe any thing above the limits of our natural capacities on the testimony of another, and only when the same is especially revealed to us; then I would ask why you waste so much time in descanting on them? According to your own rule, none but those who are favoured with the same especial revelations can believe you, and to them your preaching is useless.

These are the inconsistencies of those *who bow the knee to the image of the Baal of the present day*; who, neglecting the exhortation “not to think more highly of themselves than they ought

* Philadelphia Sermons, pages 51, 294, and 300.

to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,"* have become wise in their own conceits.

If indeed the doctrine is true, that nothing is to be believed as of divine origin, which cannot be accounted for by that faculty of comprehending and judging which we derive from nature, the number of religions must be nearly in proportion to the number of individuals. What will be clear and evident to the more discerning, will be unintelligible to the superficial and ignorant, and our unbelief will be increased in the same ratio in which our intellectual faculties are diminished.

Look from the hillock on which you stand, at the ascending and descending grades of human intellect, and contemplate the immeasurable distance between the minds of a Newton and a Hicks; of a Hicks and an Esquimaux: you will find the last unable to comprehend truths of which you possess indubitable evidence, and yourself unable to understand many of the laws by which the universe is governed, although you may have before you, the demonstrations by which the great philosopher has proved their truth.

Indeed after all this boast of regulating the conduct by those facts and circumstances only which we understand, every observer must perceive, that under the practical exercise of this principle, even the common affairs of life would stand still; that we all act on the moral certainty of the existence and operation of things, the cause or production of which is beyond our comprehension; and that it is from the evidence of their actual existence, and not the discovery of the means of it, that our belief in them is established. And such is the weakness of that understanding on which you so much rely, that even on subjects where it can with propriety be exercised, we every day see men believing and disbelieving propositions under the influence of their interests and inclinations, and sincerely changing their opinions, with their situations and circumstances.

"Reason," (says the authort of a review of the internal evidence of the christian religion,) "is undoubtedly our surest guide "in all matters which lie within the narrow circle of her intel-

* Romans, chap. xiv.

† Soame Jenyns.

"ligence. On the subject of revelation her province is only to
 "examine its authority and when that is once proved, she has no
 "more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines; and is therefore
 "never so ill employed as when she pretends to accommodate
 "them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, says this *self*
 "*sufficient teacher*, is perfectly wise, just, and good; and what
 "is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable
 "to our notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness: but it
 "should first be proved, that man is as perfect and as wise as his
 "Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but ra-
 "ther the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect and
 "all wise being, must probably, appear unreasonable, and perhaps
 "unjust, to a being imperfect and ignorant." And in reply to
 the objections to the divine origin of the christian religion, from
 the apparent incredibility of some of its doctrines, particularly
 those concerning the trinity, and atonement for sin by the suf-
 ferings and death of Christ, one of which is asserted to be con-
 trary to all the principles of human reason, and the other to all
 our ideas of divine justice, he says, "No arguments founded on
 "principles which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove
 "a proposition already proved on principles which we do under-
 "stand: and therefore on this subject they ought not to be at-
 "tended to: that three beings should be one being, is a proposi-
 "tion which certainly contradicts reason, that is *our* reason; but
 "it does not from thence follow that it cannot be true; for there
 "are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet are
 "demonstrably true: one is, the very first principle of all religion,
 "the being of a God; for that any thing should exist without a
 "cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence,
 "are propositions equally contradictory to our reason; yet one of
 "them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed. In like
 "manner the overruling grace of the Creator, and the free will
 "of his creatures; his foreknowledge of future events, and the
 "uncertain contingency of these events, are to our apprehensions
 "absolute contradictions to each other; and yet the truth of every
 "one of them is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and expe-
 "rience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining that the
 "mode of existence of all beings must be similar to our own,
 "that is, that they must all exist in time and space; and hence

"proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know that no
 "two beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted,
 "can exist at the same point of time, in the same point of space.
 "and that therefore they cannot be one: but how far beings
 "whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space.
 "may be united, we cannot comprehend; and therefore the pos-
 "sibility of such an union we cannot positively deny." And to
 those who assert that even if these doctrines are true, it is incon-
 sistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator to require
 from them the belief of propositions which contradict, or are
 above the understanding which he has bestowed on them, he
 says, "to this I answer, that christianity requires no such belief:
 "it has discovered to us many important truths, with which we
 "were before entirely unacquainted, and amongst them are these,
 "that three beings are sometimes united in the divine essence,
 "and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atone-
 "ment for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations
 "of facts only, neither contradict, nor are above the reach of hu-
 "man reason: the first is a proposition as plain, as that three
 "equilateral lines compose one triangle; the other as intelligible
 "as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what
 "manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vica-
 "rious punishments, or to what purposes they may be subser-
 "vient, it informs us not, because no information would enable us
 "to comprehend these mysteries, and therefore it does not re-
 "quire that we should know or believe any thing about them.
 "The truth of these doctrines must rest entirely on the authority
 "of those who taught them; but then we should reflect that those
 "were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more
 "sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our facul-
 "ties were ever able to discover, but which, when discovered,
 "are exactly consonant to our reason, and that therefore we
 "should not hastily reject those informations which they have
 "vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent
 "judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of seve-
 "ral propositions by demonstrations which we understand, we
 "hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of
 "whose proofs we are not able to follow: why therefore should
 "we refuse that credit to Christ and his apostles which we think
 "reasonable to give to one another."

We know that the first preachers of the gospel were generally illiterate men, and that the first converts were among the unlearned and ignorant; and it was sufficiently intelligible to them because the practical parts were then taught; which, if not the only, are certainly the most essential portion of it. Its intrinsic excellence is perhaps the best evidence of its divine origin; yet it cannot be denied that proofs of its authority may sometimes be drawn from the speculative inquiries of learned and pious men. But a very little reflection must convince us how little the reasoning of uninformed men can be depended on; and that when they are so unwise as to habituate their minds to such speculations, their ignorance must continually involve them in error and contradictions: and it surely would be prudent in these to pause, before they reject a revelation which does not accord with their crude notions of reason and the fitness of things, when they recollect that the diligent and learned researches of the master minds of such men as Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Locke, and Paley, have ended in convincing them of its truth.

There are in the Scriptures, allusions to mysteries which it seems not given to us to comprehend in this state of being; and, consequently, all inquiries into them are vain: is it not, therefore, reasonable to believe, that such is not our proper business, and that our concern is with those truths only, which have a practical operation on the minds and conduct of men, and which are clearly revealed: and if we examine the consequences to many of those who are engaged in these theoretic inquiries, must we not conclude that they tend little to righteousness, and less to their own peace.

LETTER X.

RELIGION being a subject of the greatest importance to man, and a matter solely between the Creator and the individual who worships him, its rewards and its punishments appertaining to that kingdom which is not of this world, and "the conscience of

“man being the seat and throne of God in him, of which He alone
 “is the proper and infallible judge, who by his power and spirit
 “can rectify its mistakes;”* and it being man’s duty to worship
 according to the dictates of that conscience, it must follow, not
 only from the precepts of the Christian religion, but also from
 the clearest dictates of reason, that every attempt on the part of
 others to control or direct his belief, is a usurpation; and the in-
 justice is not greater than the folly of such attempts; for who is
 there that can believe that the coerced acquiescence in any form
 of worship, can be grateful in the sight of the Almighty; or that
 he who, by the exertion of power, thus makes hypocrites, can
 render a service acceptable to him.

Yet, notwithstanding this self-evident truth, we find the spirit
 of persecution had taken such fast hold of the minds of men, and
 had become so identified with the priestly character, that although
 they were always ready to complain, and recommend moderation,
 when suffering from its exercise by others, they generally resorted
 to it when their own sect became dominant, and ages elapsed
 before the principles of toleration gained the ascendancy in any
 portion of the globe. And it is, indeed, painful to observe with
 what reluctance this wicked prerogative of power has been aban-
 doned, and that in this country, in the full exercise of the rights
 of conscience, and in the midst of the blessings which accrue
 from it, individuals are found in different Christian societies who
 evince by their conduct, the old spirit; and who, happily restrain-
 ed by the law from the use of the sword and faggot, freely in-
 dulse in contumely and reproach, the only weapons left them.

The Society of Friends early distinguished themselves as
 champions for the rights of conscience, and the consequences
 which resulted from the practical exercise of this principle in
 settling the province of Pennsylvania, have, both mediately and
 immediately, been of incalculable advantage in softening the
 hearts, and enlarging the minds of men, and have caused the
 name of Penn to be enrolled in the first class of the benefactors
 of mankind.

The soil of Pennsylvania was dedicated by the great proprietor
 to religious freedom; it was the asylum offered to all sufferers

for conscience sake; and our legislators, acting on the same principles, have done their part by protecting it from the actual violence of bigotry. This is all that they could do, and the duty remains to each religious community to suppress that spirit, which, when indulged, eradicates from the human heart all the charities of life.

This is the duty of all, and, in a more especial manner, of those who, professing to be of the same faith, also profess to walk in the path of that man: and that they are now called to the exercise of this duty must be evident from the course which you and some others have pursued.

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Let us not judge one another any more.”*

This was the exhortation of Paul to the Romans, when instructing them in the use of Christian liberty; for he had been taught by his master, *that there were other sheep, though not of this fold.*† You, however, seem to be in the state of Peter before his vision, who thought it unlawful to eat with the uncircumcised, and knew not, *that on the Gentiles also, was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost*: and, like James and John, you seem ready to call down the fire of heaven on those who do not receive the gospel according to your own particular ritual, although you must have read the rebuke of their master, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”‡

You denounce the members of Bible and Missionary Societies, and the ministers of most other sects, and stigmatise their endeavours to spread the gospel, *as an abomination in the land*; and accuse them of taking from the widow for their own aggrandisement.§ You say that they compass sea and land to make a proselyte, and that *when he is made, they have made him two-fold more the child of hell than he was before*;|| and, in speaking of

* Romans, chap. xiv.

† John, chap. x.

‡ Luke, chap. ix.

§ Philadelphia Sermons, pages 23, 24, 26.

|| Phil. Sermons, page 120.

the studies which many religious societies enjoin as a preparation for the ministry, you call it inventing religions by earthly science; and, usurping the judgment seat, you boldly pronounce every priest, thus made, to be *an enemy to his God*;* thus indiscriminately anathematising thousands and tens of thousands of men, of whom you know nothing.

Yet, when it answered a present purpose, we find you asserting, "that the law of the spirit of life in you, is not the law of the "spirit of life in your brother, whose bondage here may be different from your own; that each requires a law peculiar to "himself; and that the law in another man's mind is no law to "us;" and you say you believe that there are among the Christian professors, many who are industriously seeking the Lord, although under the power of tradition and education, and the superstition that reigns in the land.†

That no man can tell how far his own opinions are influenced by tradition and education is unquestionable, and it ought to render us cautious in censuring those of others; and if it is indeed true, that each requires a law peculiar to himself, and that the law in another man's mind is no law to us, it must follow that we can form no idea of another's duty, and that to attempt to censure or direct his conduct, is as unwise as it is presumptuous. And we can account for your inconsistency, only by supposing, that you believe yourself possessed of a faculty heretofore thought to be an attribute of Omnipotence only, and that you also are a searcher of hearts; or that, like Mahomet, you have especial revelations which release you from the obligations which you impose on others.

Neither of your positions appear to me to be correct. I believe with one of the most exemplary ministers that the Society of Friends ever produced,‡ that all true Christians are of the same spirit, though their gifts may be diverse; that sincere, upright hearted people in every society who love God, are accepted of him; and that Christianity is a pure principle in the human mind, *which is confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any*, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity.

* Philadelphia Sermons, page 289.

† Philada. Sermons, pages 51, 267.

‡ John Woolman, pages 9, 81, 325.

These are the opinions of one, who I cannot be mistaken in considering, as of greater authority than yourself; for the history of his life discovers the uniformity of his belief; and the moderation which characterised his language and opinions, sufficiently prove that he adopted in practice the recommendation of a very pious man,* “turn your eyes inward upon yourself, for you can “hardly exceed in judging your own actions, nor be too cautious “and sparing in censuring those of others: and *censuring*, indeed, “this deserves to be called, in the worst sense of the word, rather “than *judging*; if we consider, not only how unprofitable to any “good end, but how liable to infinite mistakes, and very often “how *exceedingly sinful*, all such judgments are.”

I am not a member of any Missionary or Bible Society, nor are all the measures pursued by either of them, in accordance with my opinions; but I see among them, men who, by their lives and conversations, evince the purity and uprightness of their motives, and I dare *not judge them, lest I be judged*.

In reading the rash and uncharitable assertions which I have quoted, I have imagined one of these men expostulating with you. Suppose him to say, Look to the many pious, charitable, and distinguished men who are among us, and say whether you really believe they would rob the widow of her mite for their own aggrandisement? Or do you believe that the labours of a Wilberforce,† who has devoted all his talents, and passed a life in unparalleled exertions for the relief of the oppressed Africans, and in communicating to them a knowledge of the Christian religion, are an abomination in the land? You appear to have your mind exercised on account of this people, and have expressed great zeal on their behalf; but your labours seem to be confined to declamations among your friends in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, among whom slavery does not exist, and whose abhorrence of the practice is equal to your own.

Compare these labours with those of one of our brethren,‡ who, under a like concern, believed himself called to visit the mansions of misery, and endeavour to pour into the afflicted bosom of

* Thomas à Kempis.

† He is one of the most active members of the Society for propagating the gospel.

‡ The missionary Smith.

wretchedness, the consolations unfolded by the gospel. He knew the perils and privations that awaited him, and he encountered them all. Excluded from the society of the white inhabitants, and continually assailed with contumely, he passed his days among this miserable and degraded race, until, under the pretext that he fomented rebellion among the slaves, he was imprisoned and condemned to die, on the oaths of some of these wretched beings, whose own lives depended on the testimony they gave. This was all that his enemies could do, for the regulations of the government of England did not permit the execution of the sentence until ratified by them, and the proceedings were no sooner known there than they were annulled. But it was too late! the severity of his imprisonment in an unhealthy climate had hurried him to his grave. His journal and letters show the extent of his labours, and that in many instances, even the imperfect knowledge and experience which his converts must necessarily have had of our religion, had produced a striking improvement in their conduct and conversation, and afforded great encouragement to expect the happiest results.

Now, can you believe that this man, who has given such evidence of the sincerity of his belief, and of his devotedness to what he deemed his duty, could be numbered among the enemies of his God? Or that the glimpse of gospel light which he had been instrumental in communicating to the benighted minds of the miserable beings around him, had made them *two-fold more the children of hell than before?*

To such expostulations you could make no reply, nor can the imagination conceive any plausible apology for the terms you have used. The inconsistency and extravagance of the assertions carry with them their own refutation, and the coarseness of the language can inspire nothing but disgust in every liberal mind. In one point of view only, can they be of importance to any but yourself, and that is, as it affects the reputation of the society of which you are a member; and as these sentiments are alien to those of that respectable body, it is to be lamented that a meeting which was probably attended by people of various religious professions, was permitted to separate, without some individual whose mind was imbued with their truly catholic principles, explaining what they really are: so that none might go away in

the belief that *this people also*, presume to scan the limits of the mercy of the Almighty, "and deal damnation round the land, on "each they judge his foe."

Nor do I believe that your own heart responds to such sentiments, or that in your cooler moments you can possibly believe them correct. The tongue is an unruly member, and he who talks much, will sometimes talk unwisely. We are told that although man can tame the beasts of the forest, "the tongue no "man can tame." "Behold," (says the apostle,*) "how great a "matter a little fire kindleth." "Therewith bless we God, even "the Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the "similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing "and cursing. *My brethren these things ought not to be so.* "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, "devilish. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and "good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them that make "peace."

An accurate observer will often discover how erroneously the zeal of individuals operates: he will see around him numbers always ready to counsel and advise their neighbours; to detect their errors and reprove their aberrations: but how few among us scan with equal severity their own; and this, because there is something gratifying in the superiority which attaches to the counsellor and censor of others, but always troublesome, and often painful, to sit in judgment on ourselves. So when the preacher is followed and applauded, it often begets a restless spirit: silent worship no longer affords him satisfaction, and he seldom permits it to others, when he is present. Few men have such fertility of imagination as to be able to vary such frequent discourses; he is often at a loss for a subject, and seizes with avidity every new idea, regardless of its correctness, if it possesses the charm of novelty.

The author of an essay on practical piety† makes some reflections on the situation of ministers of the gospel, which ought to be attentively considered by them. "There are perils on the

* James, Chap. 3.

† H. Moore.

“right hand and on the left. It is not among the least, that
 “though a pious clergyman may, at first, have tasted with trem-
 “bling caution of the delicious cup of applause, he may gradually
 “grow, as thirst is increased by indulgence, to drink too deeply
 “of the enchanted chalice. The dangers arising from any thing
 “that is good, are formidable because unsuspected. And such
 “are the perils of popularity, that we will venture to say that the
 “victorious general, who has conquered a kingdom, or the saga-
 “cious statesman who has preserved it, is almost in less danger
 “of being spoiled than the popular preacher; because their danger
 “is likely to happen but once, his is perpetual: theirs is only on
 “a day of triumph, his day of triumph occurs every week; we
 “mean, the admiration he excites. Every fresh success ought to
 “be a fresh motive to humiliation: he who feels his danger will
 “vigilantly guard against swallowing too greedily, *the indiscri-*
 “*minate* and often *undistinguishing* plaudits, which his *doc-*
 “*trines*, or his *manner*, his *talents* or his *voice*, may equally
 “procure for him. If he be not prudent as well as pious, he may
 “be brought to humour his audience, and his audience to flatter
 “him with a dangerous emulation, till they will scarcely endure
 “truth itself, from any other lips. The spirit of excessive fond-
 “ness generates a spirit of controversy. Some of the followers
 “will rather improve in casuistry than in christianity. They
 “will be more busied in opposing Paul to Apollos, than in looking
 “unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, than in bring-
 “ing forth fruits meet for repentance. *Religious gossip* may as-
 “sume the place of religion itself. A party spirit is thus generat-
 “ed, and christianity may begin to be considered as a thing to
 “be discussed and disputed, to be heard and talked about, rather
 “than as the productive principle of virtuous conduct.”

That this spirit exists in a considerable degree among a portion
 of the Society of Friends, I think cannot be doubted; and it
 would indeed be wise in each individual, seriously to scrutinize
 his own conduct, and consider whether he has been instrumental
 in generating or propagating it.

CONCLUSION.

When I first undertook to review some of the prominent features in the sermons alluded to, I did expect to confine my remarks within a narrow compass; but the topics which the author discusses are so various and the applications so numerous, that it unavoidably led to their extension, and I have at least left many untouched which are entitled to very serious consideration.

I know there are some very serious and pious men who lament that these sermons were published; but I am not of their opinion; for although they may, in one point of view, be prejudicial, an accurate knowledge of the whole scheme, must I think convince every thinking mind, that it is not only inconsistent with the christian religion, but that its parts are so discordant, and its doctrines so darkly mysterious, as to elude the comprehension of man; and that the author, so far from elucidating that religion by his boasted reliance on the human understanding, has been led by that modicum of it possessed by himself, into many notions totally irreconcilable to right reason.

In one respect they may be injurious; not by making converts to the system, but by impairing the belief of individuals in the truths recorded in Scripture, and thus paving the way to complete infidelity; for there are few minds so stolid as really to have faith in a religion, founded on a book, which they believe to be itself a fiction.

It would perhaps be advisable for every member of the Society, after perusing these sermons, to read the life and writings of John Woolman. Contrast often serves to elucidate the truth, and the dissimilitude is so great, that they will have little difficulty in discovering which has been actuated by that humble, peaceable, and gentle spirit, recommended by the example and precepts of the Founder of our religion. They were probably equally deficient in human learning; but while the one, confident in his own abilities, is continually involving himself in contradictions by allusions to subjects which he does not understand; the other, favoured with what learning can never supply, a large

fund of *good sense*, pursues the even tenor of his way without enlargement or inconsistency: the one, labouring to clothe his arguments in the brilliant language of the orator, leaves them involved in inextricable confusion; the other, explains his ideas with a precision and clearness, which if they do not convince cannot be misunderstood.

Indeed there is such a sober seriousness and mildness of spirit which breathes through all the writings of John Woolman; such unbounded charity for others, and such severity in the examination of himself; such persuasive earnestness in his exhortations, and such a perfect conformity between all his principles and practices, that however men may differ respecting some of his doctrines and opinions, all must acknowledge that he possessed a mind imbued with a truly christian spirit, and regard his tone and manner of writing as a model which ought to be imitated by all christian professors.

The doctrine of divine inspiration was the belief of every christian church in its primitive simplicity, and is yet the doctrine of almost all of them, under different names and modifications; and if the belief in it is impaired, I fear it must, in a great degree, be attributed to some of those who profess to be under the guidance of it. Not content with the measure of light which it affords, and which is sufficient for the great purpose of enabling him "to work out his own salvation," man, in the pride of his heart, is prone to get from under that humble state, in which alone its manifestations are rightly impressed on the mind; to believe it is given as a substitute for, and not in aid of, our reason; and mistaking his own visionary fancies for revelations, actually persuades himself that he also is invested with the attribute of omniscience. The inconsistencies in which minds thus sublimated are always involved, are stumbling blocks to many, who are from thence led to consider all as an illusive or hypocritical pretension.

These are the whims of the imagination; when man in his exaltation releases himself from the control of his reason, and eradicates from his heart the pure and unadulterated principles of the christian religion; when, forgetting his infirmities, and vaunting in his strength, he assumes that station to which he is not

called, and ministers to others, when his own light is extinguished. These are they who are described by the poet—

“Aspiring to be Gods, if angels fell,
“Aspiring to be angels, men rebel.”

But, notwithstanding the discouraging prospects which surround this people, I trust that all is not lost; that the ark is yet upborne by hallowed hands; and that Sion's mount is still encircled by a chosen band, who read with humility, reverence, and instruction, that *great spiritual and moral code*, given to man in the name and in the majesty of Him, “who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Almighty.”

THE END.

ERRATA.

- Page 7, lines 8 and 9, for “forward,” read “froward.”
 15, line 26, for “reassumed,” read “reaffirmed.”
 40, line 31, for “of,” read “to.”
 65, line 5, for “least,” read “last.”
 66, line 2, for “enlargement,” read “entanglement.”



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